

The Healthy Fridge

Just moving the food around can make a difference in the food we consume. We reach for what is convenient and what we see. Stock your own healthy fridge with these helpful tips.

Eye Level: Fresh Food Snacks

This should be your primary food source to fuel your body. Put washed, dried, and cut-up raw vegetables and fruit in clear containers on the top shelf. They will be the first things you see and are ready to eat.

Lower Shelf: Healthy Go To

Low-fat Greek yogurt and cottage cheese provide healthy doses of calcium and protein, so they should play second string. Also on this shelf, hummus and nut butters that you can pair with sliced veggies and fruits. You can also put nuts on this shelf because they last longer when they're chilled.

Middle Drawer: Meat & Cheese

Avoid salty and nitrate-filled deli meats and go for cooked meats and cheese. Shave off slices from leftover roast turkey or chicken that can also be an add-on for salads and sandwiches. One-inch cubes of Parmigiano-Reggiano or sharp cheddar can be a healthy snack when portioned out ahead of time. A sprinkle of feta or goat cheese adds sustenance to a salad or turns a tomato wedge into a tasty treat.

Bottom Shelf: Beverages

Replace sodas, punches, and energy drinks—even the sugar-free ones—with pitchers of water. For flavor, toss in slices of citrus, or cucumber and mint. All-natural orange, grapefruit, cranberry, and pomegranate juices are nutritious choices, but drink in moderation: Fill half a glass with juice, and bring it to the top with plain or sparkling water. (Juice blends can

contain only a small amount of juice, so look for the all-fruit varieties) Keep milk low-fat or skim milk for cereal and oatmeal.

Bottom Shelves: Dinner Ideas

Pack servings of cooked brown rice, quinoa, or wheat pasta to eat in the next day or two so you'll have a fiber-rich meal, even in a pinch. Do the same with extra soup or sauce. Store in single-serving packets for portion control. Eggs require cool temperatures, so leave them in the carton and tuck them in the back of the bottom shelf. Marinate any fish or meat here for tonight's dinner.

Bottom Drawers: Your Farmer's Market

Stock an array of dark leafy greens: spinach, kale, romaine, arugula, and red lettuce. Keep carrots, green beans, bell peppers, and cruciferous veggies handy here, too. Because many fruits emit ethylene gas, which speeds ripening in other produce, place them separately from vegetables.

The Door: Condiments

Place nutritious condiments at eye level. Miso paste whips up into a quick soup, while salsa makes a flavorful dip. Store fruit preserves, marinades, sauces, and other condiments used for meals – or those you'd like to avoid overdoing (ketchup, mayonnaise) – on lower shelves. Since many store-bought dressings contain unhealthy ingredients, concoct your own and keep it here. (Find a great Raspberry Vinaigrette later in this newsletter.)

In the Freezer

Stock up and store fresh veggies and fruit on the top shelf so a vitamin-rich meal or smoothie is always at your fingertips. If you have a tough time keeping portion size in check with bread, make the freezer your friend: Save a section to enjoy

immediately and freeze the rest. When inspiration hits to cook up soup, sauce, pasta, or rice, make extra, and store them in meal-sized containers. On a separate shelf, store lean cuts of omega-3-rich fish such as salmon, as well as chicken, pork, or beef.

Lisa Lewis, author of Healthy Happy Cooking, available in the First Place 4 Health online store.