

Kitchen makeover

Research shows us that our environment affects our eating habits more than we'd think.

Every one of us make about 250 food decisions a day (Coffee or tea? Peanut butter or jam? Should I finish this sandwich?). Most decisions we can't explain. We just... make them.

In fact, research shows that most of our food decisions have nothing to do with hunger, but are actually determined by what and who are around us, along with our habits and familiar routines.

The good news is that you can change your eating habits by changing your environment. You don't have to join a monastery or evict your family — even small changes to your eating environment can make a big difference.

Stay aware of what you're seeing, doing, and experiencing. Look around your home and workplace and think about how to change where, how, and with whom you eat.

The first law of food environments

Our First Law Of Food Environments states:

If a food is in your possession and/or near you, you will eventually eat it.

It might not be today. It might not be tomorrow. But it'll happen.

In other words, keep only food or drinks that you should actually consume. **Make it easy to eat well**, by having healthy and nutritious foods close and hand and easy to consume... and unhealthy, damaging foods far, far away.

Healthy eaters have healthy homes. Healthy people ensure that their environment supports their goals. Changing your surroundings is one of the best ways to start your journey to living better.

Why a kitchen makeover?

A kitchen makeover gets rid of the non-nutritious stuff and/or foods that trigger you to engage in poor eating behaviours. Then it replaces the junk with a bounty of health-promoting foods.

A kitchen makeover helps you stay in control and on track. You don't want to be deciding between ice cream and spinach while standing in front of the fridge at T-minus 15 minutes to dinner time. Healthy food decisions in our kitchen need to be stress-free and foolproof.

A kitchen makeover helps you plan and structure healthy eating. You'll appreciate having a safe home base after returning from the "food war-zone" aka modern society.

Here's how to do it, step by step.

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Step 1: Plan & prepare

Remember what's really important

Before you do this, think about why this is important to you. Go back to Week 1 and review your reasons for making healthy changes. Your confidence may waver at this point. Remain firm in your convictions. Remind yourself of what's truly important and meaningful to you in life.

Remember, you're choosing to live as a healthier person now – this is just one more way to make that happen. And this is a way to support yourself and make it easier to make better choices.

Make a plan, and talk it over

If you've got family members or other folks in your household, sit down with them before you do this. See "Working with Your Family", in our resource section.

Decide what is truly valuable to you. You may choose to keep one or two really special items (e.g. the 40-year-old Scotch; the Godiva truffles you got for your birthday; the rare artisan cheese made from Tibetan hummingbird milk, etc.).

Get a few big garbage bags, and your compost bin if you've got one.

Prepare to encounter resistance

For instance, you'll probably worry: Isn't this a waste of food?

No. If it's junk, it's not "food." Would you dig through a dumpster for dinner? No? Why not? Because the food in there isn't very good for you. It might be expired, rancid, full of bacteria, or at the very least covered in crud. It's garbage.

So why would you eat foods that have no nutritional value and actively take away from your health? How is that different from dumpster diving?

If a certain food has redeeming qualities, then you can take it to a local food bank or soup kitchen. Your dog or pet pigs may appreciate it. But if that food is complete junk, trash it. Get it out of the house. If you think it's junk, it probably is.

All right. That's the hardest part. Now let's get serious with those garbage bags.

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Step 2: Obvious junk food: Terminate with extreme prejudice

Start with getting rid of the obvious junk foods from your fridge and pantry. This includes things like:

- Chips
- Cheezies
- Chocolates or candy
- Soda/pop/sweetened drinks
- Alcohol, especially flavoured/ sweetened mixed drinks (although small amounts of red wine may have health benefits)
- Instant foods like cake mixes and mashed potatoes
- Margarine and other processed fats
- Most frozen dinners
- Most take-out or restaurant leftovers
- Bowls of candy or other snacks sitting around
- Flavoured nuts (e.g. beer nuts)



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Step 3: Trick foods: Don't be fooled

Trick foods are foods that seem healthy but aren't.

They've gone from something good (whole, unprocessed food) to something that a machine barfed out, full of sugar and chemicals, and/or something that's had all its original nutrients stripped out. (No, it's not "healthy" because it says "fruit". Check the ingredients.)

Dump these:

- Sweetened yogurt and frozen yogurt
- Breads and bagels, unless they're made exclusively with whole grains
- Other baked goods
- Most breakfast cereals
- Crackers, even the whole grain ones
- Fruit, cereal, and granola bars
- Regular peanut butter
- Fruit juice
- "Healthy" junk food (e.g. "organic" cookies, baked potato chips, "light" ice cream, etc.)

A good rule here is to check the labels. Look for forms of sugar such as high fructose corn syrup as well as hydrogenated oil, fractionated oil, and preservatives.

If a product loudly proclaims its health benefits on its label... it's probably not that good for you. "Organic" sugar is still sugar. A Fruit Roll-Up isn't an actual piece of fruit any more than a cardboard box is actually a spaceship... no matter how much you pretend.

Some examples of "trick foods"



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Step 4: Stuff you wouldn't even think about

This is even more challenging than the so-called “healthier” foods in the “trick food” list, because you don’t think about these things being a problem... or think about them at all. (How much time do you spend thinking about BBQ sauce, anyway?)

Most of these just pass under our radar, until we read the labels and discover that they’re sugar and chemical bombs. Or just not “food” at all. This includes:

- Condiments such as BBQ sauce and other sweetened sauces
- Sweetened relishes, mustards, and ketchup
- Salad dressings
- Bread crumbs, croutons, and other dried bread products
- Processed meats such as hot dogs, bacon, and deli meats
- Spreads such as Cheez Whiz or sweetened cream cheeses



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Stumped? When in doubt ask yourself a few questions:

1. Does this food come in a bag, box, or plastic package?
2. Does it have more than a couple of ingredients on the label? (If reading all the labels feels a bit overwhelming, don't worry. Tomorrow we'll give you a handy label-reading guide.)
3. Can you pronounce all of those ingredients?
4. How far away is this food from what it used to be? (And do you even know what it used to be?)
5. Is this food perishable? Just about anything good for you goes bad quickly.

Obviously, there are exceptions, but for the most part, these foods don't benefit you. Why would you want to test your willpower with them around?

You'll have to decide these on a case-by-case basis. Read each and every label. Never assume anything.

And often, you can easily substitute.

Step 5: So-so foods: Find alternatives

You may find it hard to part with certain foods. Many of these aren't really "bad" or "unhealthy" foods... but they could be a lot better.

Cool – just find ways to make them a little bit better! (Think about this as you make your shopping list.) Get creative!

Instead of...	Try...
Processed salad dressings	Making your own using some of the healthy fat ideas from Week 6
Sugary or preservative-laden sauces	Salsa Unsweetened mustard Lower sugar versions of your favourites Making your own (e.g. try mixing a can of tomato paste with balsamic vinegar and a teeny bit of brown sugar or honey – instant ketchup!)
Cheap processed foods	Upgrading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of hot dogs, try some sausages from your butcher • Instead of sweet cream cheese or Cheez Whiz, try some spreadable goat cheese • Instead of cheap wine, splurge on an expensive bottle and enjoy it slowly Hey, you're worth it!
Cooking sprays or margarine	Extra-virgin olive oil (in a spray bottle, if desired) Extra-virgin coconut oil Butter

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Step 6: Healthy foods: Restock

The fridge and pantry are probably looking pretty bare right now. No problem. You're going to fill them back up with lots of healthy choices. Below, you'll find a shopping list with some suggestions.

Step 7: Celebrate: Take “before” and “after” photos

Before you toss your foods, take a “before” picture of your pantry and fridge. Or a picture of all the foods you're going to toss, like this vast array of “edible food-like substances” to which one of our clients said farewell.

Kitchen cleanout: “before”



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After you restock with the healthy foods you've already been introduced to, take an "after" picture of your pantry and fridge.

Now that's a makeover to be proud of!

"After": Fridge



"After": Pantry



Your shopping list

Print this up and take it with you to the grocery store. You don't have to buy all of this, of course – just use it for inspiration. Easy!

Colourful fruits and vegetables

Purple/blue

- Eggplant
- Red cabbage
- Purple kale
- Beets
- Blueberries, blackberries, lingonberries
- Purple carrots
- Purple potatoes
- Black grapes
- Black cherries
- Black/purple plums

Orange

- Oranges (duh)
- Winter squash and pumpkin
- Orange peppers
- Carrots
- Cantaloupe
- Orange cauliflower
- Yams
- Apricots, peaches
- Mango

Dark green

- Spinach
- Beet greens (the tops of beets)
- Kale
- Broccoli
- Any other dark leafy green (e.g. turnip greens, collard greens)
- Brussels sprouts
- Fresh herbs (e.g. parsley, basil)
- Green beans, green peas
- Avocado
- Zucchini, cucumber (if you eat the peel)

Red/pink

- Red peppers
- Tomatoes
- Strawberries
- Cherries
- Cranberries
- Red grapefruit
- Red-skinned apples
- Watermelon
- Red grapes
- Red radishes
- Red lettuce, radicchio

Lean protein

- Poultry: chicken, turkey, duck, ostrich, goose
- Lean red meats: beef, pork, lamb, wild game, lean sausage

- Fish: salmon, tilapia, tuna, sardines, herring, mackerel, etc.
- Seafood: shrimp, crab, scallops, calamari/octopus

- Dairy: cottage cheese, low-fat cheese, Greek yogurt
- Eggs: chicken, duck, goose, quail, egg whites

- Vegetarian: tofu, tempeh, lentils & beans
- Protein powders: whey protein, egg white protein, hemp protein, pumpkin seed protein, vegetarian blends

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Healthy fats

Nuts and seeds

Look for these in the bulk section.

- | | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Almonds | <input type="checkbox"/> Macadamia nuts | <input type="checkbox"/> Walnuts | <input type="checkbox"/> Pumpkin seeds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brazil nuts | <input type="checkbox"/> Pecans | <input type="checkbox"/> Chia seeds | <input type="checkbox"/> Fresh raw coconut |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cashews | <input type="checkbox"/> Pine nuts | <input type="checkbox"/> Flax seeds | <input type="checkbox"/> Avocado |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hazelnuts/filberts | <input type="checkbox"/> Pistachios | <input type="checkbox"/> Hemp seeds | <input type="checkbox"/> Olives |

Note: many of these nuts and seeds are also available as oils or butters. Look for fresh, semi-perishable, cold-pressed and/or extra-virgin oils and nut/seed butters.

Oils & solid fats

- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Extra-virgin coconut oil or coconut milk
- Raw cacao butter

Animal fats

- Butter (grass-fed if possible)
- Fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, or herring
- Grass-fed / pastured meats & poultry
- Higher-fat dairy from grass-fed / pastured animals

Note: grass-fed, pastured, and/or wild-caught animals have a healthy, natural fat profile. Avoid fat from industrially raised / grain-fed animals if possible.

Whole grains

Look for these in the bulk section.

- Amaranth
- Barley
- Brown rice
- Buckwheat groats (kasha)
- Corn (on the cob or kernels*)
- Kamut
- Millet
- Oat groats or steel-cut oats**
- Quinoa
- Spelt

- Red rice

- Wild rice

Beans & legumes

- Dried beans or lentils
- Canned beans or lentils

Flavours

- Fresh or dried herbs (e.g. basil, parsley, oregano, cilantro, sage, thyme)
- Garlic, onions, leeks, chives
- Salsa

- Vinegar (e.g. balsamic, red wine vinegar)

- Low-sodium soy sauce or Thai fish sauce

- Unsweetened mustard

- Unsweetened pickles

- Canned tomato paste

- Chili or curry paste (e.g. Thai, Indian, adobo)

- Lemon & lime juice; unsweetened fruit juice or low-sodium tomato juice (for marinades)

*Includes air-popped popcorn.

**NOT instant oatmeal or rolled oats. These should look a bit like grains of brown rice rather than flat cereal flakes.