

Small Steps in the Kitchen Can Mean Big Changes in Your Diet

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DENVER — Eating smaller portions and healthier foods are well known staples of dieting, but small changes in how you do your grocery shopping and arrange foods in your kitchen can also have positive impacts on your diet.

The first step is always fill your refrigerator and cupboards with nutrient-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, lean proteins (meat, poultry, fish, nuts, beans, and tofu), whole grains, and low- or non-fat dairy products.

“If the majority of your home eating choices are lower calorie, nutrient-rich foods, you’re less likely to eat the foods higher in calories, sodium and trans/saturated fats,” said National Jewish Health Clinical Dietitian Alexandra Wilson, MS, RD, CDE.

For many families having only healthy foods in the house is an unrealistic goal, but there are small changes that you can make that will make a world of difference. Wilson offers the following tips:

Grocery shop at least once a week. Fill your refrigerator and pantry with only what you need for each week. Don’t stock up with a bunch of “extras” such as whipped cream or sour cream or juice that you don’t use daily. These extras add fat-laden calories, as well as sugar and sodium. Our meals are usually fine without them, but we end up using them just because they’re on hand.

Avoid buying large amounts at large box stores. Places like Costco and Sam’s Club can be great for saving money on items that you need to buy in bulk, but they can be detrimental to your diet. Box stores tend to have fewer low sodium and reduced fat items in bulk, making high calorie, high-sodium, and high-fat items invade your home easily. Having large packages of crackers, cookies or soda increases the likelihood of eating and drinking more than one serving at a time. Most houses don’t need a two-pound block of cheese and a tub of red licorice each week. Also, food in an overfilled refrigerator often goes bad before it gets eaten. This is not only costly but also can lead to increased risk of food-borne illness.

Rearrange your refrigerator and pantry. Put healthy food choices in easy-to-reach places and bury the unhealthy foods. Put the high-calorie, high-fat, high-sodium items toward the back and/or bottom of your refrigerator, so they’re harder to reach. It may not seem like a big thing since you still know they’re there, but you will likely be surprised how it discourages you from digging back there to get them and ends up slowing your consumption. In the pantry, put the healthy foods up front and at eye level. Chips, cookies and other unhealthy snacks should go on the top or bottom shelves and in the back. Out of sight, out of mind.

Do the prep work for lower calorie, nutrient-rich foods in advance. Pre-cut vegetables and fruit to make it easy to grab a snack. If the prep work is already done, you’re more likely to choose the healthier option.

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