

# A Solid Plan to Conquer Clutter in Your Kitchen

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › People who struggle with clutter are 77% more likely to be overweight or obese
- › Eating in a chaotic environment encourages you to eat more sweets
- › The first step to decluttering your kitchen is to visualize the kitchen you want and write down your wishes (such as “I want a kitchen that’s cozy and inviting for family meals”)

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Is clutter the bane of your existence? Stacks of paper, piles of toys, shelves overflowing with knick-knacks, drawers stuffed to the brim – all of these contribute to your stress levels and, in turn, encourage a poor diet and weight gain.

This is perhaps especially true in your kitchen, where clutter takes up valuable space on your counters and in your cabinets, pantry, refrigerator and freezer. You need a clear, calming space to prepare healthy meals for yourself and your family.

The same goes for your pantry and fridge; an uncluttered organized space makes it easy to locate the ingredients you need, discourages food waste and encourages purposeful decisions about what to fill your shelves with (fresh, healthy foods as opposed to processed junk).

**People Who Struggle with Clutter Are 77% More Likely To Be Overweight or Obese**

In the book "Lose the Clutter, Lose the Weight: The Six-Week Total-Life Slim Down," author Peter Walsh cites 2008 research that found people who struggle with clutter were 77% more likely to be overweight or obese.<sup>1</sup> He attributed this weight gain to the rise in stress levels that comes along with a cluttered existence.

Stress alters the way fat is deposited because of the specific hormones and other chemicals your body produces when you're stressed. For example, a 2016 research showed that **chronic stress** stimulates your body to produce betatrophin, a protein that blocks an enzyme that breaks down body fat.<sup>2</sup>

Stress-induced weight gain typically involves an increase in belly fat, which is the most dangerous fat for your body to accumulate because it increases your **cardiovascular risk**. Research also suggests that eating in a chaotic environment encourages you to eat more sweets, with the caveat being that your mind will overcome the chaos or its tendency to lead to unhealthy eating.<sup>3</sup>

## 10 Steps to Declutter Your Kitchen

Support healthy eating habits by creating a calm, clutter-free kitchen in which to prepare your meals and eat. Below is a 10-step plan from Rodale Wellness to help you declutter your kitchen effectively:<sup>4</sup>

- 1. Define your space** — The first step is to envision your ideal kitchen space and, specifically, what you want from the room. Write down your expectations, such as "I want a space to entertain guests and share meals with my family," "I want a calming space to enjoy my morning cup of coffee," or "I want a fun environment for cooking."
- 2. Identify benign and malignant items** — Look around your kitchen and identify the items that are more or less neutral and those that are malignant, i.e., they bring you down physically or emotionally. Malignant items take on many forms, such as dishes from a past relationship and fancy gadgets you don't use that make you feel guilty or like a failure.

Other malignant items include junk food, processed foods and unhealthy cooking tools like a deep-fat fryer. Gather up all the negative items in your kitchen and donate or dispose of them.

- 3. Clean out your refrigerator and freezer** — Even the fridge and freezer have an intended purpose that's unique to each of us. Your ideal refrigerator may devote most of its space to fresh vegetables while someone else's may have equal space for raw dairy products or grass fed meats.

Toss any food items that don't correspond with your vision, then give each shelf and bin a thorough cleaning. The best time to clean your fridge is when it's low on food, such as right before a trip to the grocery store or farmers market, but ideally, you should clean and declutter your fridge once a week or so.

Dispose of food that's spoiled (use common sense on this one, but don't base the decision on a food's expiration date alone). Next, tackle one shelf or drawer at a time, removing all items, cleansing the surface using a soft cloth, natural soap and hot water, and then drying it thoroughly.

While you might be tempted to use a strong disinfectant to kill germs in your fridge, such cleansers often contain toxic chemicals, and many of them damage the surface of your shelves. Check the owner's manual to be sure the cleaning agent you use is safe for your particular model (but most should do fine with natural soap and water).

For extra cleaning power, try making [this homemade antibacterial solution](#) — a mix of 2 cups of water with 3 tablespoons of castile soap and 20 to 30 drops of tea tree oil. Spray onto the surface, then wipe off. After you've done your weekly cleaning and decluttering, be sure to also "spot" clean as necessary, especially if you notice any spills or drips.

- 4. Clean out your pantry** — Similar to your refrigerator and freezer, decide how you want to devote your pantry space. You may want a section for teabags, another for spices and a shelf for pet supplies, for instance. Get rid of junk foods to leave open

space for healthy dry goods and other foods that don't require refrigeration, like sweet potatoes, onions and garlic.

- 5. Clear off horizontal surfaces** – If your counters are piled with clutter, your home will appear messy, and you won't have room to use the space as intended. As Rodale Wellness explained:<sup>5</sup>

*"In any space, especially the kitchen, it's important to remember that flat surfaces are not for storage – they're for preparing and serving. Anything that gets in your way or adds to your cleanup time needs to go.*

*Clear out all the piles of mail, instruction manuals, work materials, knickknacks, collectibles, computers, food wrappers and any other debris that doesn't belong.*

*If your horizontal kitchen spaces look like clean, functional workspaces, your kitchen will look larger and more inviting, and you'll be more likely to cook and less tempted to just load the family into the car and eat elsewhere."*

- 6. Address or create a preparation area** – Your kitchen should have a dedicated zone for preparing meals. Decide where this will be and keep all of the necessary kitchen items nearby. This includes utensils, knives, pots and pans, herbs and spices, and cutting boards. Limit items to those you use regularly and remove duplicates or broken items that are only taking up space and adding to clutter.
- 7. Create a countertop command zone** – This is the area where you put food onto plates prior to your meal. It should be clear of clutter and contain only functional items such as necessary, regularly used dishes, serving pieces and utensils. If you have items out on the countertop that impede your ability to efficiently plate your meals, donate them or move them to a new location.
- 8. Clean up your dishes** – Take an inventory of all of your dishes and glassware. If you have more than you regularly use, donate the excess or move them to storage for

special occasions when you have large gatherings.

Get rid of any broken dishes and decide if you want to keep partial sets and other odds and ends you've collected over the years. Designate a space in your kitchen for the remaining dishware and put away only the items that fit in that space.

**9. Organize cleaning products** — Many people store cleaning products under their kitchen sink. Clear out this area completely and safely discard any toxic cleaning chemicals. Make this spot an area for all-natural cleaners, such as baking soda, vinegar and hydrogen peroxide, which will help you clean up your kitchen quickly and safely.

**10. Get rid of malignant clutter** — Once you've collected items that are bringing you down mentally and emotionally, it's time to let them go. You may want to donate them, sell them, recycle them or throw them away. Making a point to remove such items from your home will free up physical space in your kitchen while making you emotionally lighter as well. As Rodale Wellness explained:<sup>6</sup>

*"Your malignant clutter may have been tormenting you for years. But you're getting a fresh start, and this harmful clutter is presenting obstacles to your growth and success.*

*Now's the time to get rid of your first batch of malignant clutter ... If you simply must have a reminder that this stuff was part of your life, take a picture of it, then tuck away the physical photo in a desk, or stick the digital version deep into the belly of your computer."*

## **Take a Breath and Revel in Your Newly Decluttered Space**

After you've decluttered your kitchen, take the time to enjoy it. Gather your family to prepare a special meal and share it together. You'll find that you'll be drawn to spend more time there, which is excellent for those of you looking to follow a healthier diet — and you may be motivated to move on to decluttering another room in your house.

From your kitchen to your bedroom, your office or your basement, it's important to visualize your home the way you want it. When considering whether to keep, donate or discard an item, ask if it will contribute to your ideal vision of the life you want.

Does the item make you feel good? Do you use it regularly? If so, determine its proper "home." If not, donate it or discard it. It may be hard to part with objects at first, but as you get into the swing of decluttering, you'll begin to feel lighter and more able to focus and be calm in your home.

Of course, decluttering is an ongoing process, not one that happens overnight. If you feel overwhelmed, start small with one shelf or drawer. Ideally, you should declutter on a daily basis and always put items back where they belong. To do the latter, this means you must create a "home" for every item.

Before you create a permanent home for any object, paper or file, make sure it's something that is truly useful, important, valuable or otherwise worthy of keeping. Try to declutter a little bit every day and follow the mantra, "Don't put it down, put it away." Little by little, this will help you to achieve a life free of clutter – and a healthier body and mind to go along with it.

## Sources and References

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- <sup>1</sup> [Boston Globe April 25, 2015](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [BBA Molecular and Cell Biology of Lipids February 2016: 1861\(2\); 130-137](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [Environment & Behavior February 2, 2016](#)
- <sup>4, 5, 6</sup> [Rodale Wellness, "A 10-Step Plan to Declutter Your Kitchen" \(Archived\)](#)