



## Does Your Refrigerator Need a Makeover?



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When it comes to keeping your food fresh and safe, your refrigerator is your best friend. Yet we don't always give it the attention it deserves. If you can't remember the last time you gave your fridge a good wipe down — or it's so stuffed that you can't find a thing in it — it could be time for an overhaul.

### *Out with the Old*

The dates of food packages let you know when foods are freshest and taste their best. Also, some dates help you determine when to dispose of foods. Check package dates on a weekly basis. Here's what the food label dates mean:

- "Use by" or "best if used by" date is the last date recommended for use of the product at optimal quality. It is not a safety-related date.
- "Expiration" date means don't consume the product after this date.
- When in doubt, throw it out!

### *A Cleaner, Healthier and More Organized Fridge*

When scrubbing the kitchen, include a "refrigerator make-over" on your to-do list. Not only will the fridge be spotless, it will improve the safety and quality of your foods. For the best cleaning results, always refer to your owner's manual.

#### *Step 1: Keep It Safe*

Set the temperature in your refrigerator below 40°F. This keeps food cold enough to prevent bacterial growth, which can cause food poisoning. If your refrigerator doesn't have a built-in thermometer, an appliance thermometer placed on the center shelf also will work.

## *Step 2: Keep It Clean*

- Use soap and water: Once a week, give your fridge a good cleaning. Wipe down all shelves and compartments with hot, soapy water. Then rinse well and dry thoroughly. Check all bottles and jars for drips and rinse and dry those as well.
- Wipe it up: Spills can spread bacteria fast. Between cleanings, wipe up any leaks or spills with hot, soapy water.
- Get organized: Make food easy to find by storing leftovers in clear glass containers. Placing smaller items in the front and taller items in the back also can help.
- Freshen it: Keep an open box of baking soda in your fridge so it will always smell clean and fresh. Change the box every three months at the time of your next make-over.

## *Step 3: Keep It Fresh.*

Making sure foods are at their peak of freshness not only protects your family from food poisoning, it also helps your food taste better.

- Schedule a weekly check: Once a week, toss all spoiled leftovers and packaged foods that are past their expiration date. While most leftover food is generally safe for about four days, freshness can vary from food to food. The *Is My Food Safe?* app can tell you exactly how long you can safely store everything from soup to steak.
- Wrap it right: Make sure all meat, poultry and seafood are either tightly wrapped or stored in sealed containers. This will ensure that their juices don't leak and contaminate other foods.

## **Step 4: Assign Foods Prime Real Estate.**

To keep foods at maximum freshness:

- Condiments: Store on the door — condiments have a long shelf-life and are okay in this warm part of your refrigerator.
- Orange juice: Stow on interior shelf to keep the juice cold.
- Butter: Keep butter in its original wrapper or a covered dish and put inside your fridge. FYI: The butter keeper in your fridge door is not cold enough to keep it fresh.
- Milk: Store milk where it's coldest, specifically the back of the bottom shelf.
- Yogurt: Cover the yogurt with a tight lid and store it in the interior of your fridge up to 10 days past the "sell by" date.
- Eggs: Keep eggs in their original cartons in the center of the fridge.
- Deli meat: Stash deli meats and cheeses in the meat drawer, where it gets an additional blast of cold air.
- Packaged raw meat: Store packaged raw meat on the bottom shelf and make sure any dripping doesn't contaminate other foods. Defrosting meats on the bottom shelf in a covered container reduces the chance of a spill and cross-contamination.
- Produce: Store fruits and vegetables in the crisper drawer. If yours has dual controls, adjust them to allow for higher humidity for vegetables and lower humidity for fruits.