



Your environment strongly affects your behaviour. For a good example, look no further than your kitchen.

Even if you know to eat colourful vegetables every day, heck even if you *want* to eat colourful vegetables every day, if there aren't colourful vegetables on your counter or in your fridge it's not going to happen!

That's why this week we focus on creating your healthy kitchen.

Luckily even small changes can make a big difference. To start with considering the first law of the kitchen:

If food is in your house either you, someone you love, or someone you marginally tolerate, will eventually eat it. Whether it's eaten as a planned meal, as a special celebration, as a late-night snack, or as an unplanned stressed-out binge, it's going to be eaten.

So the best way to improve your nutrition is to stock up on the food and the drinks you know are healthy for you. Have healthy foods readily available and ready for you to eat.

Everything else? Well if it's for a special occasion only buy it on that occasion. Or if it's a once in a while treat, go out for the treat, rather than bringing it home to your nutrition sanctuary.

Let's say you like ice cream on the weekends. Well, instead of buying a carton and keeping it in the freezer to tempt you every single day, don't buy it at all! Just head out to the local ice cream shop instead.

This way the temptations stay outside your home.

Hopefully, you're getting the message. When your kitchen is a healthy eating zone it's a lot easier to make good choices.

That's why a kitchen makeover helps you stay in control and on track.

Step 1: Plan & Prepare

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. It 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.

It 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.

Make A Plan

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", coming up later this week.

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.

Step 2: Obvious Junk Food:

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)

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 yoghurt and frozen yoghurt
- Bread 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.

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

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?
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.