

# How to Clean and Organize Your Refrigerator

An organized and clean refrigerator means less searching for food so meal prep and writing a grocery list is faster and less food (and less money!) is wasted. Your risk of foodborne illness is lower because foods will stay colder, raw meats will not drip on to other foods, and there is less risk of spoilage.

Here are the steps:

- Turn off the refrigerator and unplug.
- Remove everything. Discard old or spoiled food.
- Perishable food should be placed in a cooler to keep it cold.
- Remove shelves and drawers; wash with hot soapy water, rinse with clean water, and dry.
- Wipe inside interior and bottom of refrigerator.
- Replace shelves and drawers. As you put back the food, wipe off the jars and containers..



Tips for organizing and proper food storage:

- If the refrigerator has a special drawer for meats, use it to keep raw meat, seafood, and poultry away from other ready-to-eat and perishable foods to prevent cross-contamination. If there is not a special drawer, keep these foods in a pan on a lower shelf to prevent juices from dripping on other food.
  - Milk, yogurt, and cottage cheese can all be stored together on a shelf in the refrigerator. Keeping these in the door is not recommended because they are exposed to the warm air when the door is opened and this will cause them to spoil faster.
  - Eggs should be stored in their carton on a shelf, not in the door (same reason as above)
  - Sauces and condiments can be kept together in the door of the refrigerator. If they are in the door, they are easy to see which reduces the chances that the same thing will be purchased many times over.
  - Have a designated shelf for leftovers and make a plan to use them. Freeze them if you aren't going to use in four days. Remove leftovers from plates, serving dishes, pots, or pans and place in clear plastic containers before storing in the refrigerator. Label them. Rotate the oldest leftovers to the front. This will save on space and reduce the chances that leftovers will be pushed to the back of the refrigerator and be forgotten.
  - Store bottled or canned beverages in a pantry or cupboard and cool down with ice when needed. This will free up space for foods that must stay cold. Refrigerated juices and opened bottles of juice should be refrigerated. If space is an issue, these can be transferred into smaller, clear containers.
  - Use foil, plastic wrap, plastic bags or airtight containers for packaging foods for refrigerator storage. Moisture- and vapor-proof materials are best.
- Wipe the exterior of refrigerator and remove dust and lint from front grill. Clean condenser coils to remove dirt and lint. Follow the same steps for the freezer. For the freezer I also make a list of what is in the freezer so I can put items on my menu list and use them.

## Check the temperature of the refrigerator or freezer.

Store food at cool temperatures. From 34°F to 40°F is best. Foods stored at temperatures above 40°F spoil rapidly. Refrigerator/freezer thermometers can be purchased at hardware and big box stores.

## From now on ...

Wipe up spills in the refrigerator with hot, soapy water when they happen to prevent bacteria (germs) from growing. Clean the refrigerator regularly to reduce food odors and remove spoiled foods immediately so decay cannot pass to other foods.