

A kitchen counter with various fresh ingredients and jars. In the foreground, there is a wire basket filled with lemons and limes. To the left, a metal bucket holds fresh green herbs. In the center, several glass jars with silver lids contain different types of pasta and white beans. To the right, a metal bowl is filled with colorful bell peppers (yellow, orange, and red). The background features a wall of small, square, light-colored mosaic tiles.

HOW TO CREATE A

HEALTHY KITCHEN

Dr. Sharon Lee Rasa

How to Create A Healthy Kitchen

For baby boomers, like me, learning computers and becoming tech-savvy was foreign territory. I remember when I opened my first laptop...I was overwhelmed by the idea of touching any button for fear of blowing up the whole thing or taking some tragic irreversible action. It was only with a lot of coaching, patience and self-talk did I begin to develop some confidence that I would not hurt the computer, myself or anyone in the nearby vicinity.

For some people embarking on a new healthy lifestyle, the idea of new appliances, gadgets, equipment and design can seem overwhelming. Even worse, the idea of not using a microwave can throw some into a tizzy about how they will manage their daily kitchen life. Not to fear. This e-book is here to offer some suggestions and get you started.

I often tell my patients the kitchen “is the heartbeat of the home.” Early morning chats and midnight snacks while sitting on a favorite stool or just sitting in silence and enjoying a warm tea or favorite beverage are some thoughts that come to mind. It is here that we prepare meals for family and friends that nourish and provide connection and community.

The colors, smells, design, cleanliness and lighting can contribute a great deal. My Mom’s favorite saying, “Cleanliness is next to Godliness”, is still something I hear in my head whenever it’s time to clean up the kitchen.

You may say, “well, my kitchen is clean.” Yes, But is it healthy?

Are you cleaning with products that deliver more toxic ingredients than you can name or have you switched to non-toxic, chemical free, hypo-allergenic, and “safe for the environment and you” products?

Everything that touches our skin or we breath in, either strengthens us or stresses us as those molecules are absorbed into the bloodstream. Look at some of the labels on the products...if it says, “poison, unsafe to drink, toxic to children and pets or even worse...may cause cancer...it’s a good idea to safely get rid of it and exchange it for safer options. Look at your toothpaste tube. Does it read, “harmful if swallowed?”

Take an Inventory

Find a time of day when you will be undisturbed and can quietly spend 15 minutes taking inventory of your kitchen.

Whether you live in an apartment, a Condo, a private home, or a mobile home, most of us have a kitchen. We all are running around so fast we do not have time to see our own kitchen with fresh eyes. That’s what I am asking you to do now. Walk into your kitchen from all the entry points as if you are seeing it for the first time.

What first three things do you notice? How do you feel in this room? What do you like about this room? What isn't working for you anymore? What would you like to change or improve on?

Take a visual inventory.

Lighting -

What type of bulbs are you using?

The energy efficient light bulbs called compact fluorescent lights come with big problems. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, emergency procedures must be followed in the event a light bulb breaks. They state that people and pets must leave the room, open the windows and shut off the central heating or air-conditioning system.

We recommend you choose incandescent or full spectrum lighting.

Flooring -

Go with a floor that you can easily sweep clean with a broom and wipe up spills with a sponge. Today there are eco-friendly, "green" choices that do not "off gas" and, with proper care, last a very long time.

Appliances -

This is a personal choice. We have individual needs and favorites. Sometimes we “inherit” older models and they work just fine. Our job is to maintain them and keep them healthy clean.

Stove

We have an older stove and I refuse to use “harsh” detergents to clean up the greasy stains. To my utter amazement, what works best is a few drops of essential oil of lemon. Within moments the grease breaks down and is easy to wipe up.

Refrigerator

My Mom cleaned ours with a toothbrush and toothpicks to get into all the nooks and crannies.

The need for a “empty it and wipe everything clean” will be determined more by the size of your family and how careful you are in storing and wrapping the items you place on the shelves. We grew up with an open box of Arm & Hammer Baking soda sitting on the back shelf to absorb odors, and I continue the tradition.

Personally, I do like a clean fridge, but it does take time and work. When I do the “big clean” I am horrified by what managed to leak under the fruit and veggie drawer and may be clinging or growing in its own petri dish.

Folks, *You need a clean fridge to have a healthy kitchen.* Just find what works for you and stay with it.

Ceiling –

Be sure to “look up.” We live near the shore and keep our windows open as much as possible. The shore breezes can be quite strong and with them they bring particulates, pollen and such. Looking up I see “things” that just shouldn’t be living on the ceiling.

Colors –

Color can have a big impact on mood and emotion. Choose a color that you not only feel good in, but something kind and gentle...pale yellows, light greens, and calming blues

Smell –

We all have different “smell” abilities. My husband has a keen sense of smell and can often detect foul smells long before I do. Your kitchen does NOT NEED FEBREZE! In fact, YOU do not need Febreze. Do a google search and learn how most of its top ingredients are known to be carcinogens (cancer causing).

Clutter –

Studies have shown that “clutter” may contribute to lack of productivity and fatigue. Take time to create storage and you’ll be more likely to put things in their proper place.

Baskets, tubs, and wicker boxes are handy to have.

Table tops -

Keep them clean and add a simple bowl of fresh fruit and flowers for an inviting look.

Counters

Have you ever gone into a new home model? The counters are clear. They may have a lovely hand towel or small pitcher with a glass.

Ceiling fans –

Wouldn’t want to be without our ceiling fans, but they require cleaning several times throughout the year. Get on a ladder and clean the top of the paddles.

Take inventory of the cabinets

Go through each and every cabinet and remove items you have not used in years. This includes jars, baskets, plastic ware, and worn utensils and dishes.

Next, look at the food pantry. If you still have the same spices, flour, and condiments that you had since the day you moved in 5

years ago...it's time to update and replenish. Buy organic, if you can. The quality will be better and they will not have been irradiated.

Get rid of the bad stuff. It will be far easier to stick to your healthy lifestyle if you are not tempted by the “shake ‘n bake,” and “sloppy joe” mixes. Take a close look at the labels of your products and look for sensitivity triggers like fructose and long names that you can't even pronounce (It's probably a synthetic chemical compound.)

Tools for cooking healthy

We talked about the kitchen being one of the most important rooms in your home. This is where you will create and prepare the meals you will make for your family that will nourish your body, mind, and soul. Having the right tools and equipment will make your life a whole lot easier. One of the biggest gripes patients have is how much time it takes to eat well. It does take planning. Doing things like making big batches on the weekend and dividing them into individual meals will make your life easier. Having tools and equipment to create recipes from scratch and shorten the cutting, chopping, mixing time is essential. Invest in the best quality you can and the rewards will be many.

Cast Iron Pans

I wish I would have started using them much earlier. They seem to be much more popular in the south. Our son and daughter-in-law gave us our first 10-inch pan and we soon followed up with a 12 inch, 6.5 inch and the dutch oven. Everything tastes better in them. They conduct heat evenly and go from stovetop to oven with ease. I admit I was hesitant because I wasn't sure about how to care from them. Buy the plastic scraper and use it to scrape the pans after each use--rinse with water--dry completely--add a drop of coconut or other oil to the pan and store for the next use.

Get rid of the Teflon

Perfluorooctanoic acid or PFOA is what DuPont used in creating Teflon in 1938. We now know that PFOA has been linked with a range of health problems, including [thyroid](#) disease, infertility in women, and developmental and reproductive problems in lab animals.

Teflon pans quickly reach temperatures that cause the non-stick coating to begin breaking down, releasing toxins into the air surrounding you. When your Teflon pot or pan reaches 680 degrees F (which takes about three to five minutes of heating), at least six toxic gases are released.

These chemicals are easily absorbed by your body, and have been linked to a growing number of health concerns.

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20089479?itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum&ordinalpos=1

No More Microwave!

Fast isn't always best.

Some of the concerns with microwave usage:

- Radiation leakage
- Carcinogenic toxins may be leached from plastic and mix with the food
- Valuable nutrients are lost in the heated food
- Chemical structure of food changes with no long term studies to show the effects
- This is a controversial issue... One of the scientists, Hans Hertel, who studied the damaging effects of microwaves, was issued a gag order.

Stainless steel

- Durable—they will not peel, chip or vaporize (as do non-stick pans)
- Longer-lasting than ceramics and earthenware
- Rust-proof—unlike cast iron and carbon steel

- Aluminum-free

Look for the 300 series stamped on the bottom of the pan. This grade quality indicates its durability and resistance to rust and corrosion. Quality pots and pans are primarily in the 300 series (either 304 or 316)

Ceramic

- No trace metals or chemicals leach from the cooking surface.
- Easy to cook without oil or butter.
- Far-infrared cooking technology: cooks foods from both the inside and outside at the same time.
- High Temperature cooking: can withstand extreme temperature differences without cracking.
- Versatile: Use on stovetop, in the oven and broiler, even on the barbeque.
- Easy to clean: non-scratch, non-toxic ceramic glaze surface. Because Xtrema is non-porous, you don't have to worry about scratching or pitting.

But, They do break!

Healthy Kitchen “*must haves*”

High speed blender

- Vita Mix or BlendTec are two favorites, but there are others people rave about
- Food processor

I Love my Cuisinart

Immersion blender

Use for creating thick stews and smashing veggies

Crock Pot

Bone broths, slow cooking recipes, and the busy lives we live.

Mason Jars

I often make my morning smoothie and pour it into a wide mouth mason jar that I bring to work. They are great for storing dressings, sauces and homemade stock.

Sprouter

There are many ways to go here. It depends on your budget and space. Visit www.sprouthouse.com and discover what is right for you. Rita is the owner and we call her the Sprout Lady. She will spend personal time coaching you as to which sprouts to start with and the tools you need to make them.

Spiralizer

This is what you need to make zucchini spaghetti and long ribbons of cucumber, carrots and radishes for salads, or apple spirals for apple slaw.

Juicer

Buy the *best* you can afford and with proper care you will have it for many years!

Ditch the scented candles!

If you're smelling a fragrance, then there's probably *phthalates* in your candle. Phthalates are the chemicals used to create smell, and have been found to be a hormone disrupter. These molecules compete for the same receptor sites on the cell membrane where estrogen should be linked. Research is showing that increases in estrogen-linked cancers are correlated with the increased use of household deodorizers.

http://www.scsu.edu/news_article.aspx?news_id=832

Lead in our candles?

http://www.ur.umich.edu/9900/Oct18_99/8.htm

Compost

Foodstuffs are the #1 material sent to the landfills. Onion peels, carrot trimmings, apple cores, and egg shells will all become nutrient-rich dirt in a few months if you toss them in the compost. To compost, you can buy or build a compost bin, or if you have a big yard, a simple compost pile will work just as well.. If you're planning to compost indoors, try an odor-minimizing, compact composter, like the [Naturemill](#). For those who have the luxury of a backyard or outdoor space, there are many online resources such as howtocompost.org to get you started.

WaterWaterWater

Although the EPA regulates water treatment, its standards are based on annual averages. In reality, levels of these toxic byproducts vary throughout the year according to farming cycles. It's not just the chemicals that are added to the drinking water we also have to consider, but also the hundreds of chemicals that make their way into our water system from car exhaust, pollution, industrial waste and pharmaceutical drugs. Some research shows more than 100,000 of these chemicals are in our water supply.

This subject is lengthy and each family needs to advocate for themselves. Depending on budget, need, and space, different systems offer a variety of options. Two of my personal favorites are Berkey water filters for table top, and for a home filtering system you may want to check out the <http://hydrocareusa.com/>

Keep informed on cleaning products through the Environmental Working Group website, www.ewg.org

EWG (Environmental Working Group.org) recommends avoiding:

- Air fresheners. Open windows or use fans instead.
- Antibacterial products. Antibacterial products, including ones containing *triclosan*, fuel the development of drug-resistant superbugs. Use a simple mixture of 9 parts water, 1 part white vinegar as a basic cleaner that kills many germs.
- Fabric softeners and dryer sheets. These products often trigger asthma and allergies. Use a quarter-cup of white vinegar in the rinse cycle to naturally soften clothing and reduce static.
- Caustic drain cleaners and oven cleaners. These toxic ingredients can burn eyes and skin. Use a drain snake or plunger in drains. Or the next time you're dealing with a clogged drain, tap into one of the best uses for baking soda with this drain-cleaning recipe: Mix baking soda with apple cider vinegar to help open up your drain. Let the combination bubble for 15 minutes, and then rinse it with hot water.

- Products with formaldehyde listed on available safety data sheets: Ajax Dish Liquid, Lemon; Ajax Triple Action Dish Liquid Hand Soap, Orange; Fab Ultra Liquid Laundry Detergent, Spring Magic; Finish All-in-1 3X Concentrated Gelpacs, Orange Grease Cutting; Finish All-in-1 8X Power Gelpacs, Orange Grease Cutting; Palmolive Ultra Dish Liquid, Original; Palmolive Ultra Concentrated Dish Liquid, Lotus Blossom & Lavender; Woolite Everyday Laundry Detergent, Sparkling Falls.

Natural Cleaning Agents

- Borax
- Baking soda
- White vinegar
- Essential oil of lemon, peppermint, clove, and wild orange
- Hydrogen peroxide

Favorite cleaning recipes

Removing stains and mold

Combine baking soda with hydrogen peroxide

Wood floor

White vinegar and essential oil of lemon or wild orange (you can use both)

Laminate floors

Borax, white vinegar and essential oil of lemon

Cutting boards

Spray bottle with white vinegar and essential oil of lemon

Drain Cleaner

¼ C Baking Soda

¼ C Distilled White Vinegar

3 drops wild orange essential oil

Pour essential oil directly down the drain, followed by baking soda, and then the vinegar. Allow to sit for 15 minutes.

Pour hot water down the drain, followed by cold water to unclog drains.

Soap Scum Remover

2 C hot water

½ C Borax

10 drops lemon essential oil

Add ingredients to a spray bottle and shake well. Spray windows or mirrors and wipe dry. Store in cool place for one to two months

Window and Mirror Cleaner

2 C water

2 Tbl white vinegar

2 Tbl rubbing alcohol

5 drops peppermint essential oil

Add ingredients to a spray bottle and shake well.

Remove your shoes

Clostridium difficile (C. difficile) is a germ (bacterium). C. Diff has now become a public health threat that is also resistant to a number of antibiotics. C. diff infections can cause multiple health conditions such as bad diarrhea which can also progress to colon inflammation and further serious health problems

This study, published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), was conducted by researchers from the University of Houston. They looked at samples from 30 houses in Houston and found C. difficile on 40 percent of shoe soles and 33 percent of bathrooms and toilets. The easiest way to stop germs from getting in your house is to leave your shoes at the door.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260634368_Investigation_of_potentially_pathogenic_Clostridium_difficile_contamination_in_household_environs

Not sure where to begin?

- Spend some time looking at pictures of kitchens that you are attracted to. Notice what appeals to you. Is it the layout? Color? Lighting? What makes it inviting to you?
- Begin with simple changes. Start small.
- Buy a new tool every month.
- Change out the light bulbs.
- De-clutter.
- Clean.

Send me your before and after photos...I'd love to see them!

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