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Linda's Organizing Tip for April 2007:  
Maintaining a Lean Inventory in Your Kitchen

Ever since the "October Surprise" (Buffalo's unexpected ice storm, during which my family and many others- lost power for 10 days) I have been maintaining a lean inventory of my refrigerator and freezer. This was initially motivated by having to reduce the contents quickly (before it spoiled) but later maintained because of the simplicity it created in finding what I need, planning for shopping trips and general cleaning.

I expanded this kind of thinking to my pantry and slowly began using up all the "excess" items that I had been storing. I found that I could go for weeks using up all the different types of foods. I didn't necessarily have multiple cans of the same item, just lots of choices. This "natural purging" created space on my shelves and I was pleased at the ease with which I could see what I had and what I needed from the store, as well as put things away after shopping.

I have a family of somewhat "small eaters," and thus have always been wary of making "warehouse/club" bulk purchases. I have always felt some pressure to buy those larger amounts thinking I might save money, but often, this just resulted in excess supplies on my shelves, and food in the larger containers would often grow stale before we used it up. Since I have adopted the philosophy of "lean inventory" I have felt freer, lighter, and happier and I am still saving money because I am only buying what I need and know I can use. For me, saving a buck here and there isn't worth the mental cost of having to look at and deal with crowded cupboards.

Try these suggestions for the next few weeks and see if they work for you:

- ✓ Avoid making bulk purchases unless you think you can consume the item in the next 2-4 weeks.
- ✓ Make a list of what you regularly buy, make several copies and try using it for a few weeks as a base to start from. Circle what you need, and stick to it.
- ✓ Check the pantry, cupboard, freezer, and fridge before you buy. Use up what you have before buying more. See how long you can go.

- ✓ Buy a small number of different categories of foods each week. For example, this week you might buy grapefruit, crackers & cheese. Next week you might buy yogurt and apples. This will avoid buying too many types of snacks, fruits, or vegetables that may spoil before they get used up. This number will differ depending on the number of people in the family, the number of meals and snacks eaten at home, and the amount people eat.

This may seem like a small thing to change, but you might be surprised to find what a relief it is and how good it feels to open up a clean, clear cupboard or freezer. Research shows that stress is a factor in many illnesses and even something as seemingly inconsequential as organizing your pantry can lower your stress and make you healthier.

For assistance with this or any other organizing task, contact Linda.

I welcome all feedback about this article. Please feel free to e-mail me anytime.

*Linda was selected as a Semi-Finalist Winner of the “Rolodex Office Makeover Challenge.”  
She will be competing for the Grand Prize at the  
NAPO Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 25-28, 2007.*

Previous month's tips can be viewed at [www.simplybacktobasics.com](http://www.simplybacktobasics.com).

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