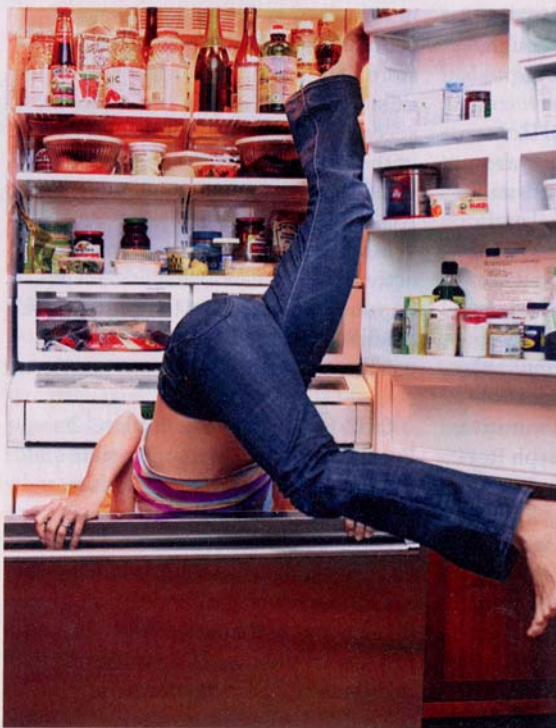


# Signs Your Kitchen Is Making You Fat

Your plates, pantry, and lightbulbs may hurt your weight loss efforts. Easy strategies set you up for success. ■ BY SALLY KUZEMCHAK, RD



THE KITCHEN is the heart of your home, but it might also be at the heart of your unwanted weight. Everything from the size of your plates to the wattage of your bulbs has a direct effect on what and how much you eat, according to research in the *Annual Reviews of Nutrition*. Here are signs that your kitchen is sabotaging your waistline—and simple fixes to get the scale moving in the right direction.

## Your Plates Are Platter Size

“Most of us make a habit of filling our plates and finishing what’s on them,” says Lisa Young, PhD, RD, author of *The Portion Teller Plan*. But since the 1970s, dinner plates have grown 25%, to 12 inches or more in diameter. Eat off a plate about 2 inches smaller and you’ll serve yourself 22% fewer calories per meal, which can

“ STASH LEFTOVER CAKE AND SWEETS IN OPAQUE CONTAINERS IN THE BACK OF THE FRIDGE. JUST SEEING TEMPTING FOODS CAN TRIGGER A CRAVING.

mean a 2-pound weight loss in 1 month, says Brian Wansink, PhD, director of Cornell University's Food and Brand Lab and the author of *Mindless Eating*.

■ **SOLUTION** Rethink your place settings. Use your salad plate to hold higher-calorie meats or pasta, and load your dinner plate with veggies, says Young. If you plan to buy new plates, the best size is 10 inches in diameter, says Wansink. "Any smaller, though, and you'll go back for seconds," he adds.

### You Love Bright Light

High-wattage lighting can raise stress levels, stimulating your appetite and causing you to eat faster than usual, according to research reviews. On the flip side, too dim is no better—studies show low lighting lessens inhibitions.

■ **SOLUTION** Many modern kitchens have layers of light sources, from under-the-cabinet halogens to recessed lights around the perimeter and a decorative fixture over the table, says Joseph Rey-Barreau, a lighting designer in Lexington, KY. When you're cooking, flip on as many lights as you'd like, but when it's time to eat, use no more than 240 total watts. That's the equivalent of four 60-watt bulbs in a four-light over-the-table fixture, for example, or six 40-watt bulbs in six high hats; with compact fluorescent bulbs, use 75 to 100 total watts.

### The Mail Is Stacked on Your Counter

"Kitchens often become dumping grounds," says Peter Walsh, a professional organizer and the author of *Does This Clutter Make My Butt Look Fat?*

A messy space makes healthy eating harder because it's a lot easier to grab a few cookies or order pizza than it is to unearth a countertop and cook. Plus, clutter leads to stress, which raises cortisol levels in the blood, increasing hunger, adds Pam Peeke, MD, a *Prevention* advisor and the author of *Fit to Live*.

■ **SOLUTION** Pick one spot for mail and newspapers, and keep large areas of counter space clear for meal prep. Also, store a few cooking tools, such as a plastic steamer or food chopper, on an easily accessible shelf. And reserve an area in the kitchen for eating only, designated by place mats, suggests Evelyn Tribole, RD, who specializes in intuitive eating. When you separate eating from other activities, you're more likely to focus on your food and listen to fullness cues. Studies show that when distracted, you'll eat 15% more.

### Your Glasses Are Wide

People serve themselves more soda and juice when using short, wide glasses than they do with tall, skinny ones, according to recent research. That's because we focus on the height of beverages when pouring a portion. Americans drink about 350 calories a day—pour just 2 extra ounces of OJ every morning and you could gain 3 pounds in 1 year.

■ **SOLUTION** Use skinny glasses for soda and juice, and fill wider ones with water and other calorie-free quenchers. When it comes to weight loss, what you drink has a greater impact than what you eat: Studies show that you could lose 1 pound in 6 months just by cutting out one sugar-sweetened drink serving a day.





## You Have Plenty of Pantry Space

Bulk shopping can help cut food bills, but if you store groceries in their super-size packages, you're more likely to supersize your meals. Researchers found that people prepared 23% more food when cooking from large containers and ate twice as many candies from big bags as from smaller ones. Having a large variety of food may cause you to overeat too: "With four types of cookies at your fingertips, you're more likely to try a little of each in search of satisfaction," says Domenica Rubino, MD, director of the Washington Center for Weight Management and Research in Virginia.

■ **SOLUTION** Big packages don't have a natural stopping point, so break them down into smaller containers or single-serving portions. Also, keep only one variety of your favorite treat in the house to help curb temptation.

## You Have a Clear Cookie Jar

According to a research review, just seeing tempting food makes people feel hungrier. It also causes the release of dopamine, a brain chemical that produces a feel-good sensation and may intensify a particular craving.

■ **SOLUTION** "Reengineer what's within reach," says Wansink. Put trigger foods in opaque containers and stash them in an inconvenient spot. When you need a step stool to reach those cookies or have to push past veggies to get to the leftover cake in the fridge, it serves as a speed bump to help you pause and reconsider, says Wansink. You should also create a no-brainer snack bucket, adds Rubino. Load an open container with yogurt and cheese sticks, and keep it front and center in the fridge. If you chose a fruit cup instead of potato chips every day, you'd be 4 pounds slimmer in 6 months.

## Your Kitchen Is Grand Central

On average, kitchens are 50% larger than they were 35 years ago, making them a place where lots of activities happen, such as watching TV or paying bills. According to a recent study, participants who ate while watching TV consumed more food and ate more often—about one extra meal per day.

■ **SOLUTION** Move the TV or laptop out of the kitchen, and shift tasks like talking on the phone to the den, where food is out of sight. And between meals, keep the kitchen lights off—it's a subtle sign that says the kitchen is closed. ■