



Sondi Bruner • Holistic Nutritionist • [www.sondibruner.com](http://www.sondibruner.com)

## Stocking a Healthy Pantry

Eating healthfully is whole lot easier when you have the ingredients you need at your fingertips. You can build a superstar pantry and make tasty 'fast food' from scratch in your own home. Depending on your budget, building a healthy pantry can be done in one fell swoop, or you can do it gradually.

### Why bother with a healthy pantry?

- It's a real pain in the butt to have to shop for dozens of ingredients each time you have a hankering for a healthy meal (which, by the way, I hope you crave regularly!). With some key staples on hand, you can assess a recipe quickly and feel confident that you've got everything (or almost everything) you need to make it.
- A well-stocked pantry will save you time at the grocery store and in the kitchen. You'll spend less time shopping for ingredients, as well as less time deciding what to eat each night, since you'll have so many choices laid out in front of you.
- A kitchen full of ingredients means that you'll save money, since you won't be purchasing convenience foods, eating out or reaching for the take-out menu when you're hungry and staring at an empty fridge.
- A pantry full of healthy foods will help you get healthy. Duh, right?

### The first steps to building a healthy pantry

#### 1. Clean out the old stuff.

Comb through the items in your cupboards and get rid of the stuff that has expired or you don't use anymore. That bottle of curry paste that you haven't used in four years? Toss it. I don't care what it cost you, if you haven't used it by now, you probably aren't going to.

#### 2. Start checking labels.

Look closely at the ingredient lists of products and start eliminating the ones that don't meet your health goals. Depending on your objectives, what you're looking for may vary (wheat, eggs, soy, corn, dairy, refined sugar, etc.). Get rid of the stuff that doesn't support your health.

Take the extra step to learn more about where those unwanted ingredients hide – get yourself on Google and find alternative names for things like gluten or high fructose corn syrup.

There are a few baddies I wouldn't recommend to anyone, no matter your situation. Check for artificial colours, fake sweeteners, trans fats (look for the words 'hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated'), MSG, sulphites and high fructose corn syrup. I'm also not a fan of non-organic corn or soy, as these products are usually genetically modified.

### **3. Get the right tools and supplies.**

An organized pantry is easier to use, so get what you need to keep yourself on track. Purchase glass jars or Tupperware for storage, and buy plain labels. Depending on your space, you could also buy things like baskets or extra shelving for your goodies.

## **Healthy Pantry Essentials**

We all have different preferences, so of course each pantry can be customized to suit your personal tastes. However, here are some of the key ingredients I always like to have on hand.

### **Grains and Flours**

My pantry is gluten-free, but that doesn't mean the only thing I have around is rice. Here are some of the grains and flours I like to have around.

- ✓ Brown rice (basmati or short grain)
- ✓ Millet
- ✓ Wild rice
- ✓ Red rice
- ✓ Buckwheat
- ✓ Quinoa (technically a seed, but I'm including it here)
- ✓ Brown rice pasta
- ✓ Brown rice flour
- ✓ Chickpea flour
- ✓ Sorghum flour
- ✓ Millet flour
- ✓ Arrowroot flour
- ✓ Gluten-free rolled oats

### **Oils, Nuts and Seeds**

Nuts and seeds are packed with healthy fats and oils, which can go rancid quickly when they are exposed to heat, light and air. That's why I store my nuts and seeds in the fridge or freezer, where they'll stay fresh for months.

- ✓ Almonds
- ✓ Cashews
- ✓ Walnuts
- ✓ Pumpkin seeds
- ✓ Sunflower seeds
- ✓ Sesame seeds
- ✓ Sesame oil
- ✓ Hemp seeds
- ✓ Flax seeds
- ✓ Olive oil
- ✓ Coconut oil
- ✓ Hemp oil

## Beans and Legumes

These work wonderfully in a plethora of dishes. I like to have a variety of beans on hand, and I typically buy them dried because they're far cheaper. However, if time and planning is an issue for you, feel free to go for the canned variety.

- ✓ Chickpeas
- ✓ Kidney beans
- ✓ Black beans
- ✓ Green and red lentils
- ✓ Split peas
- ✓ Cannellini beans
- ✓ Pinto beans
- ✓ Navy beans

## Dried herbs and spices

There is more to flavour than copious amounts of salt!

- ✓ Oregano
- ✓ Parsley
- ✓ Basil
- ✓ Red pepper flakes
- ✓ Cayenne
- ✓ Curry powder
- ✓ Turmeric
- ✓ Thyme
- ✓ Himalayan salt
- ✓ Cumin
- ✓ Coriander
- ✓ Onion powder
- ✓ Garlic powder
- ✓ Cinnamon

## Baking Supplies

I love to bake healthy treats and like to have the stuff I need at my fingertips when I have a craving for double chocolate chip cookies.

- ✓ Vegan chocolate chips
- ✓ Shredded coconut
- ✓ Baking powder
- ✓ Baking soda
- ✓ Vanilla powder (or extract)
- ✓ Coconut sugar
- ✓ Maple syrup
- ✓ Raw honey
- ✓ Cacao powder
- ✓ Cacao nibs
- ✓ Dried fruit (raisins, cranberries, etc.)
- ✓ Unbleached muffin cups

## Miscellaneous stuff

- ✓ Rice vinegar
- ✓ Balsamic vinegar
- ✓ Organic ketchup
- ✓ Jarred tomatoes (crushed, diced or whole)
- ✓ Gluten-free soy sauce or tamari
- ✓ Miso paste
- ✓ Tahini
- ✓ Mustard
- ✓ Nori sheets
- ✓ Artichoke hearts
- ✓ Applesauce

## In the freezer

Don't forget about the freezer, which is a great way to store healthful ingredients and leftovers. I like to batch cook and stick jars of soup, chilli and stews in there so I can defrost them later for a no-fuss healthy meal. I also stick batches of muffins and cookies in the freezer and pull them out when the craving strikes.

- ✓ Frozen fruit (works great in smoothies)
- ✓ Frozen vegetables (choose your faves)
- ✓ Vegetable stock, frozen in jars or ice cube trays
- ✓ Pesto, frozen in ice cube trays
- ✓ Organic brown rice tortillas
- ✓ Frozen organic meat or fish

## Pantry Organization Tips

**Keep similar items together.** When you've got all your grains or spices in one place, it's easier to find and use them.

**Prioritize items by how frequently you use them.** Put the stuff you use all the time at the front of your cupboards, where you can grab them quickly. You can try placing the ingredients you use most near your prep space, too.

**Find the right storage containers.** Discover which storage options work best for you. I have a motley crew of mason jars in my cupboard that I've washed and saved from things like nut butters, tomato sauce or salsa. They're all different sizes and I'm okay with that. If you prefer your shelves to be more visually attractive, consider purchasing jars that are all the same size.

**Label everything.** I can't tell you how many times I've put something in a jar and said to myself, 'I'll remember what that is. It's so obvious'. And then gazed at it a month later, scratching my head, without the foggiest notion of what I put in there. Get plain white labels and write the name of the item, along with the date you bought it, so you'll know how fresh it is.

## Take your time

There's no race to the finish when you're building a healthy pantry. Start off with stocking the foods and flavours you enjoy the most. So if you love Italian food, get armed with parsley, oregano, basil, canned tomatoes and tomato paste. If Mexican is your thing, buy loads of dried or canned beans, tomatoes, chilli powder and cumin, and stick a bag of organic corn tortillas in the freezer.

A great pantry doesn't happen overnight, unless you've got the skills and financial resources of Martha Stewart. Be kind to yourself, and build your pantry as your time and money allows.

Once you've got your pantry set up, all you'll need are a few fresh ingredients from the grocery store and you'll have a stress-free, delicious meal ready for the table.