

THE CHILLING EFFECTS OF YOUR REFRIDGERATOR

Your fridge may keep your food cold, but it's heating up the earth. Even though today's refrigerators use only about half as much energy as models from ten years ago, they still account for about 14% of total household electricity use – more than any other kitchen appliance. If you want your kitchen to be a place for consuming food not energy, follow these simple steps:

Keep the fresh food compartment between 37 and 40 degrees, and the freezer at 5 degrees.

Check that the door seals are able to hold a piece of paper in place even when you pull on it. If they can't, cool air may be escaping, decreasing efficiency.

Make sure there is less than a quarter of inch frost on the freezer walls, since ice buildup puts more strain on the refrigerator's motor.

Keep your fridge well stocked but not overstuffed, to help maintain its ideal temperature most efficiently. If the fridge is close to empty, fill the space with pitchers of water.

Clean the coils (usually located on the back of the fridge or behind a panel at the bottom) annually, and leave a space between the wall and fridge to let air circulate more easily.

Consider an Energy Star model. Starting in April, refrigerators with the Energy Star tag must be at least 20% more efficient than their conventional counterparts. You'll save on utility bills – and, over the new refrigerator's lifetime, you'll also save enough energy to power the average household for months.