# How to Clean a Refrigerator and Remove Fridge Smells

Empty it, wash it top to bottom, and fix the source of the smell - so it stays fresh, not just covered up.



| 45-60 min | 3-4 months | 3-5 C | -18 C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Full deep clean | Repeat deep clean | Fridge temperature | Freezer temperature |

**How this works:** Most fridge smells come from spilled food, old leftovers and mould in the seals or drip tray. Cleaning alone is not enough - throw out the source, wash every removable part, dry everything fully, then use an odour absorber. Food left out of the fridge for more than 2 hours should be thrown away, not put back.

## Before You Start - Safety First

- ☐ Switch the fridge OFF and unplug it before the deep clean
- ☐ Put frozen and chilled food in a cool bag or a box with ice packs while you clean
- ☐ Work quickly - aim to have food back in within 1 hour
- ☐ Never use bleach inside a fridge, and never mix vinegar with bleach
- ☐ Do not use boiling water on glass shelves - it can crack them
- ☐ Do not use abrasive scourers or oven cleaner inside the fridge

## What You Need

- ☐ Warm water and mild dish soap
- ☐ Baking soda (2-3 tablespoons, plus a small box for odour)
- ☐ White vinegar (for seals and a separate rinse)
- ☐ 2-3 soft cloths or microfibre cloths
- ☐ Soft sponge and an old toothbrush
- ☐ A large bowl or sink of warm, soapy water
- ☐ Bin bag for spoiled food
- ☐ A dry towel, rubber gloves and a cool bag

## Step-by-Step Deep Clean

1. **Empty it completely.** Take out all food, jars and bottles. Throw away anything past its date, mouldy, leaking or smelling bad. Wipe sticky jars and bottles before they go aside.
2. **Remove shelves, drawers and door bins.** Let cold glass shelves warm to room temperature for a few minutes first, then wash them in warm, soapy water. Rinse and dry fully.
3. **Clean the inside, top to bottom.** Dip a cloth in warm water with 2 tablespoons of baking soda dissolved in it. Wipe the ceiling, walls, shelf runners and floor of the fridge. Work top to bottom so drips fall onto areas you have not cleaned yet.
4. **Scrub stuck-on spills.** Lay a warm, wet cloth over a dried spill for 5 minutes to soften it, then wipe. Use the toothbrush for corners, runners and the drain hole at the back.
5. **Keep the drain hole clear.** If water pools at the bottom, clear the small drain hole at the back gently with a cotton bud or the toothbrush - never push a sharp object into it.
6. **Wash the door seals.** Wipe inside every fold of the rubber seal with a cloth dampened with equal parts vinegar and water. Dry well - trapped moisture in the folds is where mould grows.
7. **Dry, replace and switch on.** Dry the interior with a clean towel, put the dry shelves and drawers back, switch the fridge on and let it reach temperature (about 30 minutes) before food goes back.

## Removing Fridge Smells - In Order

1. **Find and remove the source first** - spoiled food, a leaking packet or a spill under a drawer. No absorber works while the source is still inside.
2. **Wipe with the baking soda solution** above, including under the drawers and inside the seals.
3. **Leave an open box or small bowl of baking soda** on a shelf. Stir or replace it every 30 days - it absorbs odours between cleans.
4. **For a stubborn smell,** spread crumpled newspaper or a shallow tray of dry coffee grounds or activated charcoal inside the empty, switched-off fridge, close the door and leave for 24 hours, then wash again.
5. **For a fresh scent,** wipe shelves with a cloth dampened with water and a little lemon juice, then dry. Use lemon only as a final wipe - it does not clean on its own.

**Important:** Never mix vinegar and baking soda together in a sealed bottle - they fizz, lose their cleaning power and can build up pressure. Use them separately. And never use bleach or bleach-based cleaners in a fridge - residues can contaminate food.

## The Missed Spots

| Spot | How to clean it |
|---|---|
| **Door seals** | Wipe every fold weekly; check monthly for black mould and dry after cleaning |
| **Handles and exterior** | Wipe with warm, soapy water, then dry. Clean stainless steel in the direction of the grain |
| **Drip tray** | If your model has one at the back or base (check the manual), empty and wash it - stale water there is a common hidden smell |
| **Coils** | Every 6-12 months, unplug the fridge and gently brush or vacuum dust from the back or base coils so it cools efficiently |
| **Under the drawers** | Remove drawers at every deep clean and wipe the floor underneath - spills collect there unseen |

## Put Food Back Safely - Checklist

- ☐ Fridge is at 3-5 C and freezer at -18 C before food goes back
- ☐ Only food that is in date, sealed and clean goes back in
- ☐ Leftovers are in covered containers, labelled with the date
- ☐ Raw meat and fish go on the bottom shelf, in a sealed container
- ☐ Cooked and ready-to-eat food goes above raw food
- ☐ Do not overfill - cold air needs room to circulate

## Prevent Smells - Weekly Habits

- ☐ Check dates once a week and throw out anything spoiled
- ☐ Wipe spills straight away, before they dry or drip down
- ☐ Cover all food - uncovered food is the biggest cause of smells
- ☐ Use leftovers within 3-4 days, or freeze them
- ☐ Replace the baking soda box every 30 days - write the date on it

## Maintenance Schedule

| When | Task |
|---|---|
| Weekly | Date check, wipe spills and handles, wipe door seals |
| Monthly | Replace baking soda, clean door bins, check the drain hole |
| Every 3-4 months | Full deep clean using page 2 of this guide |
| Every 6-12 months | Clean coils and drip tray, check seal grip (a banknote held in the closed door should resist being pulled out) |

### Notes

Tip: Do a deep clean just before a big weekly shop - the fridge is at its emptiest, and new food goes into a clean space.