

LUNCH PREP & PACKING TIPS

Smart Prep

- Pack lunches the night before and store them in the refrigerator overnight.
- Maximize leftovers. Prepare extra servings at dinnertime for the next day's lunches. Pack the leftovers in lunchboxes in the evening when you're doing your regular dinner clean up.
- Elicit the help of your children. Teach them how to make nutritious lunches. Even a small child can help put carrots into a container or fill a water bottle. As they grow, give them more responsibility.

Stocking Up and Packaging

- Keep fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other nutritious foods on hand.
- Keep nuts (for older children) and dried fruit on hand for emergencies.
- Buy from bulk bins to reduce your costs. (Read ingredient labels carefully!)
- Make sure you have a set of containers that your child likes and can open easily.
- Write your child's name on all containers before they leave the house.

Packing Waste-free Lunches: Packing a waste-free lunch is easy once you make it part of your daily routine. Here are a few guidelines to get you started...

Pack Food in Reusable Containers—Avoid plastic bags, plastic wrap, aluminum foil, and prepackaged foods whenever possible.

- Sturdy containers prevent “squishing.”
- Re-sealable containers make it easy for children to save uneaten food for an after-school snack.
- When you your child “picks out” uneaten food, you're provided you with a view into his lunch habits and preferences. Talk with your child about the food that comes home. Adjust quantity and food choices periodically. With prepackaged foods, the lunchbox may come home empty, but you won't know how much has been eaten and how much has been tossed into the trash can.
- Purchasing lunch foods in larger containers instead of single-serve packages costs less. Buy yogurt and applesauce in larger containers and spoon it into a smaller container for lunch. Buy quality bulk bin items, including fresh-ground peanut or almond butter, nuts, dried fruits, and granola.
- Consider purchasing a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) share or shop at the farmers' market. Visit [LocalHarvest](#) to find a CSA or farmers' market near you.
- Cut up fruits and vegetables. Children can eat some at lunch and save the rest for later. It's hard to take two bites of an apple during snack time and save the rest for lunch. It's easier to eat a wedge or two and then reseal the container for later.

Use a Refillable Drink Bottle—Consider using a made-to-last water bottle instead of refilling single-use bottles.

- It is widely suspected that single-use water bottles may leach chemicals into the water.
- If you use a refillable bottle, your child can save some of his/her water for later. If you pack a juice box or pouch, most of it may end up in the trash, and your child will have nothing left to drink at the end of the day.
- Water spills are easier to clean up than juice spills—at home, at school, and in your child's lunchbox.

Use a Cloth Napkin Instead of Paper—Make or buy a napkin for your child to decorate. This can be a fun family project and will provide your child with a sense of ownership, increasing the chances that the napkin will make it home again.

Pack Reusable Utensils Instead of Disposables—Provide your child with utensils that will make lunch feel like a “real” meal

Add a Note! -- A little note telling your child how special he/she is can go a long way in improving their day!