



When my daughter was seven, I'd start each day optimistically packing her lunch with love and homemade nutrition. And then my bubble would pop when lunch returned home in a jumble with just a few nibbles eaten. These "lunch wars" ensued at our house for a few years, with me insisting she eat her lunch, reminding her that she needed energy to sustain her for the long school day, cajoling her for wasting food, etc. Sound familiar?

Then I got this brilliant idea to quit packing lunches and get out of the lunch business entirely. That would go for my son, three years older, too. So I threw in my lunch-making apron, feeling a little guilty about it at the time since all the other moms seemed to be doing fine with pleasing their little munchkins at lunchtime. But the tug-of-war over lunch at our house was officially over.

I suddenly had time in the morning to shower and do my make-up and actually put on real clothes (instead of just sweatpants) and there was a lot less yelling during the morning routine – and when the kids came home. How did I do it? *I taught the kids to pack their own lunches.*

10 STEPS TO TEACH KIDS TO PACK THEIR OWN LUNCH

CUT THE CORD: Explain that you're not going to make lunch anymore and that lunchtime is a great opportunity to learn about nutrition, organization and taking control of what goes into our bodies. Packing a healthy lunch is important to feeling good and thinking effectively during school, so explain to your children that you're going to train them to pack their own lunches.

WHAT'S IN THE BAG: Teach kids to pack an entrée (something with a protein, like nut butter, tofu, cheese or leftover meat) and two side dishes, including fruits and vegetables. A stainless steel water bottle is the other must-have. We always pack in **reusable lunchware** and avoid pre-packaged foods for health and environmental reasons.

ACCESS: Move the **lunchboxes** and the lunch pantry down low where your kids can easily see and reach everything they need.

MAKE A LIST: Have the kids review the lunch pantry and then create a wish list of things they want from the supermarket.

GO SHOP: Take your kids shopping with their list. Focus on the perimeter of the store where the fruits and vegetables, meats and dairy products are located - not the center where most of the pre-packaged foods are located. As you make your purchases, discuss.

MIX THINGS UP: Be flexible about their choices. Variety makes things interesting. If your child loves edamame or seaweed snacks, like my daughter does, make them available as your budget allows. I like to make homemade banana muffins and other baked goods for them to pack and go; leftovers are good, healthy options, too.

LEAVE THE KITCHEN: If the kids are old enough to safely prepare their lunches themselves, get out of their way. If not, lurk around, but busy yourself with other tasks while they pack their lunches and help as needed. Make sure they do the bulk of the work.

REINFORCE THEIR CHOICES: Don't complain about their choices so long as their lunch includes at least one entrée, two sides and a water bottle.

IGNORE WHINING: Expect that at first it will be a chore for the kids to learn lunch-making skills and they might complain. Just ignore it.

SMILE: Celebrate the end of lunch wars in your home – and notice that much less food comes home uneaten to be dumped in the garbage can.



Sandra

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California eco-mom Sandra Ann Harris founded ECOLunchbox to empower families with non-toxic lunchtime tools to help them learn to reduce their dependence on plastics. Scientists are learning more everyday about the health and environmental hazards of toxins in plastics.

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