

Lunch packing hacks and other useful mealtime tips

By SUZANNE KENNEDY

Chilly mornings and warm afternoons can only mean one thing – it's back-to-school time. Take advantage of some of these ideas to make your mornings a little bit smoother.

Breakfast

I'll be honest, most of the time it's cereal. I mean, I do know one woman whose husband gets up early and makes a hot breakfast for the entire family, but that's a pretty rare characteristic in a spouse, if you ask me. Anyway, this year I plan to jazz it up by cooking those muffin tin portable breakfasts that have been popping up on my newsfeed. If I triple the recipe, I might have enough to make it through the week. Still, most of them seem like good sources of protein, which is really important in the morning. There's also a super easy DIY instant oatmeal that is absolutely delicious. The boxed packets aren't nearly big enough for my kids, so they always

end up eating at least two...and that can get expensive! I use this recipe from momables.com.

10 cups quick oats, 1 tsp. salt, 1 to 1.5 cups brown sugar, 1 cup powdered French vanilla creamer, cinnamon to taste

Measure out 4 cups of oats and blend them into a powder. Mix everything in a big bowl. Add sliced

almonds, dried blueberries, or anything you want. Store it in the quick oats container.

Lunch

Be sure to make a lunch box housing area. Job #1 when the kids get home from school is to empty the lunchboxes and clean everything out. You don't want things thrown all over the kitchen counter. Having the lunchboxes in one place eliminates the frantic search in the morning. Lunchboxes are also great for kids who are home all day. It's

really easy for them to get into the habit of cruising through the kitchen, grazing on whatever and doing way too much snacking throughout the day. By packing a lunch and snack in the morning, it squashes those snacking drive-bys that result in kids not hungry for a good dinner.

Regardless of whether your children are in school or stay home, lunch time is always stressful (or is that just my family?). I feel like I just get done yelling at my kids to put the breakfast stuff away when they're asking me, "What's for lunch?" Last year I started to get a handle on that. On Sunday night or Monday morning (thank you, late start day), I make a bunch of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and a few meat and cheeses, as well. I put them all in separate baggies and stick them



Nutrition

in a Tupperware container in the refrigerator. I also purchase items in bulk, like almonds, trail mix, dried fruits, pretzels, etc., and put single servings of those into baggies or plastic containers. I do the same with cheese cubes that I've cut from a block (or string cheese) and canned fruit. Yes, you read that correctly, canned fruit. I know that fresh is better, but canned is easier and lasts longer. Don't judge. They can have fresh fruit with breakfast and as a snack after school. I take yogurt and spoon it into separate containers as well. I like using the bento type containers, but Glad plasticware is way cheaper and I don't panic if one is accidentally thrown away. The children can grab something from each bin and be on their way.

Enjoy these great grab-and-go ideas for lunches: almonds, jerky, peanut butter, rolled turkey, chicken, roast beef, salami, or ham, trail mix, whole grain crackers, goldfish, graham crackers, unsalted popcorn, applesauce, cheese sticks, yogurt, cherry tomatoes, carrot sticks, celery sticks, bell pepper strips, apple slices, grapes, mini corn dogs, pretzels, cranberries, raisins (my kids will only eat those covered with yogurt). No more boring lunches!

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