

# LUNCHBOX BLUES

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Every morning I set out two lunch bags, and begin the task mothers have lovingly completed for over a century: pack a nutritious lunch for my school-age children. I put a napkin in each bag. Then, quite frankly, I'm stumped.

The second grader has a milk allergy, which rules out any product containing butter, mayonnaise, yogurt, cheese, milk, cottage cheese, or anything in a sour cream base. He won't touch a vegetable unless it is in the witness protection program, and insists fruits be coated in chocolate or disguised as a chip.

The fourth grader won't eat cheese, processed meat, or peanut butter. She likes vegetables with dressing, but not if the dressing touches the vegetable before the moment of consumption - which makes it soggy. She will eat a sandwich, but only if received in a "lunch trade" with a friend, in which case all previously mentioned restrictions no longer apply.

Whatever is packed can not have a suspicious odor after sitting unrefrigerated for 3 ½ hours. It must be sweet enough to make a grown-up pucker, yet healthy enough to pass lunch lady inspection (mommy doesn't want another note from the school nurse). Lunchbox contents must be different from yesterday's selection, and packaged in an ecology friendly manner for the 10- year-old environmentalist. Foods making smiley faces and whimsical ships are preferable.

People from my parent's generation argue today's children are offered too many choices. Back in their day, youngsters were encouraged to eat what was put in front of them, or go hungry. Life seemed simpler then - before children's diets consisted of portable meals with feature-movie toys. I could almost get nostalgic. However, then I remember parent's from that generation were expected to raise preschoolers without the benefit of disposable diapers or Disney videos, and it all seems so barbaric.

By 7:40 AM, the kids are ready, but their lunches still consist of a napkin. Refusing to admit defeat, I toss in a cookie, a carrot rolled in Ovaltine, a juice box, and a piece of jewelry for the lunch lady.

*Bon Appetit!*

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