

[ajc.com](#) > [Print Edition](#)

## Taking lunch in safety and style

### **New containers keep it fresh, fun: Almost anything edible can go to work or school with you.**

By Debra Samuels

Boston Globe

Monday, December 01, 2008

Are you brown-bagging it?

If so, you're not alone. Research indicates more people than ever are bringing their lunch to school and work for economic, nutritional and environmental reasons. According to NPD, a Port Washington, N.Y.-based research group, adults toted an estimated 8.5 billion lunches to work last year — 15 percent more than in 2003.

A whopping 93 percent of those who brought lunches cited budgetary reasons. And with good reason: NPD says the average fast-food lunch costs almost \$6, three times as much as it costs to make lunch and bring it with you.

But as the millions of brown-baggers know, lunch brought from home has evolved. While sandwiches still dominate (men like ham sandwiches, children tend to get PB&J, NPD's research found), women seem less inclined to make a sandwich than they might have in the past. Their lunches increasingly include bars of some sort, yogurt and some frozen entrees.

Lunch containers have kept pace with changing tastes. They can keep your salad crisp, your dressing separate, your drink cold and soup hot, and your taco intact.

Several new products for packing lunches help reduce the volume of disposables. Wrap-N-Mat is a square of fabric lined with plastic (the good kind) that closes with a Velcro strap to wrap sandwiches or cookies. When opened, it doubles as a place mat.

It can be washed and dried overnight and used again and again. It comes in a variety of colors and designs ([www.wrapnmat.com](#)). Also check out the [www.reusablebags.com](#) Web site, which offers items for toting all manner of things around, including food.

Today's containers are often designed with specific foods in mind. There is, for example, a hinged plastic

container for a banana ([www.bananasaver.com](http://www.bananasaver.com)). Fit & Fresh ([www.fit-fresh.com](http://www.fit-fresh.com)) has compartmentalized containers with snap-in, fitted cold packs. A carrier for salads has a lid that contains the dressing. Flip open a cap and the dressing drizzles onto the salad. The Breakfast Chiller comes with a doughnut-like ice pack that surrounds a container for milk or yogurt.

Kids' lunch totes are still adorned with superheroes and princesses, but instead of metal and hard plastic boxes, they are soft, insulated sacks with pockets for cold packs and elastic bands for securing bottles.

Nutrition author Betsy Block says she shops for containers with safety as well as convenience in mind. She cautions that consumers need to know what containers are made of.

She advises looking for the numbers 1, 2, 4 and 5 in the recycle triangle on the product, which let you know it's safe for storing and reheating. "Even if the risk is small, why take the chance if you have choices?" She recommends the National Geographic Green Guide Web site ([www.thegreenguide.com/doc/77/plastics](http://www.thegreenguide.com/doc/77/plastics)) as a place to educate yourself further.

Deborah Hamilton, creator of the Web site [www.lunchinbox.net](http://www.lunchinbox.net), spent nine years in Japan and became a fan of bento, the Japanese portable meal that is the ultimate in compartmentalized lunchboxes. Healthy food arranged attractively for both kids and adults is serious business in Japan.

Her site illustrates the lunches she packs for her young son. "Basically I am too lazy to make him something different from what we eat at home," says Hamilton, "so it is all in the packing."

She has a collection of Japanese-style lunchboxes for her son with all manner of sauce containers, muffin holders and cartoon-character-shaped molds for rice balls or sandwiches. Her site has recipes, excellent tips for making food in advance, product reviews, and information on bento boxes (which are also a great way to practice portion control).

Target stores seem to have the largest variety of lunch solutions. You will find them in the housewares and outdoors departments.

Get healthy, be frugal and go green. If you can make it, you can take it — in safety and style.

The San Diego Union-Tribune and Pittsburgh Post-Gazette contributed to this article.

## THE LATEST IN LUNCHING

> Nostalgia reigns with the retro black dome metal lunch box and Thermos. The capacious interior accommodates lunch for even the largest appetite. Available at [www.lunchboxes.com](http://www.lunchboxes.com). About \$29.95.

> Modeled after the multitiered containers used in India for tiffin, a light meal or snack, the To-Go Ware 2-Tier Stainless Steel Food Carrier comes with its own plate. Available at [www.to-goware.com](http://www.to-goware.com) or [www.reusablebags.com](http://www.reusablebags.com). About \$18.50.

> The 12-ounce Micro Lunch Bowl by Aladdin comes in pink and blue. Inside the lid, there's a hidden compartment for a spoon. Available now at Target and Wal-Mart and soon at [www.aladdin-pmi.com](http://www.aladdin-pmi.com). About \$8.

> Tupperware, the mother of all plastic ware, makes this container for its Lunch'n Things line in chic colors (below). Available at [www.tupperware.com](http://www.tupperware.com) or through a Tupperware distributor. About \$11.50.

## BROWN-BAGGING TIPS

> Don't wait to make your lunch in the morning, when you are often strapped for time. Do it the night before, no matter how tired you might be.

- > Cook extra dinner the night before and take leftovers for lunch the next day. Or do some batch cooking on the weekend: Roast a turkey or chicken breast or beef to make your own lunch meat rather than buying pricy packaged meats that can be high in sodium and nitrites.
- > To fill out your noon repast, throw in a cut-up apple or an orange. Says nutritionist Janet Little: “If you cut it up, you will eat it. Unpeeled oranges don’t get eaten.” Same goes for vegetables.
- > Pay attention to which foods give you energy — or at least don’t weigh you down — in the middle of the day and bring those to eat. Eat lightly if you have a sedentary job.
- > Keep food in your office that you can use any day— canned sardines, good crackers, canned soup, peanut butter, etc.

— From news services

## SAFETY FIRST

- > Most of us know the perishable food on the buffet table shouldn’t be left out for more than two hours, but we often forget that the same rules apply to the lunchbox.
- > It’s important to keep perishable food either cold or hot. Bacteria thrive at temperatures between 40 degrees (refrigerator temperature) and 140 degrees, so foods shouldn’t stay in this zone for more than two or three hours, including prep time. If you or your child brings home any perishable leftovers, discard them.

### Keep cold things cold

- > Use an insulated lunch bag and an ice pack. A frozen juice box can double as an ice pack.
- > If you pack lunch the night before and it includes perishables, refrigerate it. Add chips, cookies, etc., in the morning.
- > If making the lunch in the morning, use frozen bread for sandwiches with perishable fillings. It’ll keep things colder, and the bread will thaw out by lunchtime.

### Keep hot food hot

Use an insulated Thermos to keep foods like soup or pasta piping hot. Fill the Thermos with boiling water and let stand for a few minutes while you heat the food to 140 degrees or above, then empty the Thermos and pour in the hot food.

### Keep things clean

- > Wash your lunchbox daily with hot soapy water to keep bacteria from growing, then air-dry.
- > To avoid food-poisoning bugs, wash your hands before, during and after preparing lunch. Also make sure all preparation areas are clean.

— The Oregonian

## More on ajc.com

- [New bluefin tuna fishing quota criticized](#)
- [Beaujolais Nouveau hits bars after poor crop](#)
- [FROM THE MENU OF ... Crabapple Tavern 12350 Arnold Mill Road, Suite 6, Alpharetta,](#)
- [On the New Years menu: prosperity and luck?](#)

[770-667-7456](#)

- [Give out these cool candies this Halloween](#)
- [Tea time on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan strains out stresses](#)
- [Tokyo unseats Paris as dining capital in Michelin ratings](#)
- [NEWS & NOTES: Limit time with the grill](#)
- [How much would you pay for a grape?](#)
- [RESTAURANTS: Savor strawberry sweetness](#)

[Expand this list](#)

## Related Subjects

- [Deborah Hamilton](#)
- [Japan](#)
- [Tupperware Brands Corporation](#)

[Expand this list](#)

---

### Find this article at:

<http://www.ajc.com/services/content/printedition/2008/12/01/brownbag.html>

 [Click to Print](#)

[EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

- Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.