Healthy Diet HACKS : Pack a Lunch

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If it’s prepared with nourishing whole foods, something **as simple as packing a lunch** everyday can make a **substantial change in your health**. We all want to be healthier, but let's face it, for most of us, "if it ain't easy, we ain't doin' it." We've been well trained, I like to say "domesticated", by the food industry to expect our food to be fast, cheap, and effortless.

The “quality” of the food you can prepare at home far exceeds anything you can grab on-the-run, but it does take a little time to prepare. You can reduce that time by following a few simple HACKS. According to the Urban Dictionary a lifehack is "a tool or technique that makes some aspect of one's life easier or more efficient" and that’s exactly what these HACKS are all about. So here's how you can get lunch done with a maximum of nutrition and a minimum of effort;

Hack #1 – Collect some gear

The right gear makes it easy to pack lunch and easy to clean-up. You don’t have to spend a lot of money. In fact, you may already have items that can be re-purposed into some great, functional lunch gear.

- ***Soft-sided Lunch Box*** – you can use a paper bag but a soft-sided lunch box with a little insulation and a freeze-pack or two will allow you to keep your lunch fresh all day without needing a refrigerator. A shoulder strap is really nice to have. A lunch box that will hold your water bottle is also an added convenience.

- ***Reusable Freeze-packs*** – you can freeze water in a water tight container or you can pick-up a couple of these. Get the ones made with rigid plastic. They will last forever.

- ***Glass, SS, or Aluminum Water Bottle*** – you'll need something to drink. This could be a simple as a mason jar.

- ***Food Containers*** – mason jars, glass and/or SS containers. These are reusable, easy to clean, and non-plastic. All plastics leach chemicals and are best avoided.

Hack #2 – Stock the Larder

In case you're not familiar with the term, a "larder" is a room or cupboard used to store food. (Sorry, I'm from Maine, we talk funny). You can't make a great lunch if you don't have great ingredients on hand. Here's a shopping list with everything you'll need.

- ***Salad Vegetables*** – not a one of us is eating as many vegetables as we should for our health and lunch is the perfect time for a salad. Pick-up some organic greens, cucumbers, radish, onion, peppers, etc. Be brave, try something new in your salad.

- ***Full-fat cheese*** – great for a snack and great on your salad.

- ***Full-fat dairy*** – yogurt, cottage cheese, and sour cream are great on their own and also great for dipping vegetables.

- ***Fruit*** – buy organic whole fruits, not canned or juices that have a lot of added sugar. Be brave, try some new types of fruit.

- ***Meat*** – look for organic grass-fed and pastured. If you can't find that look for hormone and antibiotic free on the labels. If buying fish look for "wild-caught" on the label.

- ***Eggs*** – look for free-range and organic.

- ***Raw nuts*** – The ingredient label should just list the type of nuts and nothing else.

- ***Nut butter*** – try something besides peanut butter and don't buy anything with added sugar or hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oil.

- ***Condiments*** – get some extra virgin olive oil, apple cider vinegar, and some organic mixed spices

Hack #3 – Cook Extra

One of the keys to taking your own lunch every day is making it a really easy morning routine. You need to have the basic components of your lunch already cooked before the morning starts. This really doesn't require any extra effort at all. You just need to cook more during your evening meals. If you're making chicken, then cook an extra leg or two. If you're making hamburger patties, cook a few extra. If there's a side dish from your evening meal that would go good with lunch, then make extra. All this extra food goes in the frig and waits until you pack your lunch each day.

Hack #4 – Designate a Prep Time

Don't kid yourself and think you'll get up in the morning and put in the time to make a really good salad or wrap or other lunch entrée. Your goal should be to have all this work done before the workweek starts. Personally I designate Sunday night, after the evening meal, as my lunch prep time. I craft a weeks' worth of deeply nourishing salads on Sunday nights.

I make my own dressing with extra virgin olive oil, apple cider vinegar, and organic mixed spices. You're probably thinking "a salad every day, that must get boring", to which I would respond "only if you're making boring salads". If you vary the ingredients and type of salad the variety of tastes and textures is endless. However, the point isn't that you have to have a salad every day for lunch, the point is to prepare whatever it is you're going to have ahead of time. Which brings us to our final hack.

Hack #5 – Grab and Go!

If you've taken advantage of the prior hacks then your morning routine consists of just grabbing nutrient-dense whole foods and tossing them in your lunch box. It’s truly grab-n-go, but it’s real food not pre-processed junk.

Here’s a look at a typical lunch for me. The quart Mason jar has one of the Sunday night salads. The dressing is poured right on the root vegetables in the bottom of the jar when I make the salad on Sunday night. There are some raw nuts and an orange. Also a glass container with some leftover homemade smoothie and finally a cut of pastured ham. In the background you can see my insulated lunch box. I pack it all in and away I go, ready to take on the day.

Give these HACKS a try and leave me a comment and let me know how you make out.