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TOGETHER

Life

GREEN YOUR YARD.....
NATURAL CLEANERS THAT WORK
..... FUN NATURE VACAYS

Eat
FOR THE
Planet



Plant- Forward Eating With Kids

After I became a mom, the once-abstract notion of sustainability took on real meaning: When I'm gone, will my kids have clean air, safe water, enough food? As I spoke with scientists for my book *How to Be a Conscious Eater*, I realized we can all make a difference from our own kitchens. Here's how, one baby step (and veggie meatball) at a time. →

by **SOPHIE EGAN**



MELANIE ACEVEDO/TRUNK ARCHIVE

1

Eat beef, pork, or lamb just once a week.

Unless you already cook meatless meals most nights, you'll make the biggest impact with this one step. Swap poultry into a few dinners a week, fish into one or two (see page 74 for tips), and then round things out with vegetarian or vegan meals (turn to page 76 for our kid-friendly recipes). Some relevant stats that sound familiar but bear repeating: It takes 427 gallons of water to produce a burger, versus 52 gallons for a chicken breast. And beef produces 20 times the greenhouse-gas emissions of beans. In short, raising cows and other livestock takes a toll on the planet. It's estimated that Americans consume on average more than a pound of beef and a pound of pork per week, according to the USDA.

**EASY SWAPS FOR
LITTLE KIDS**

- Pack turkey sandwiches instead of ham sandwiches in your kid's lunch. Or put in one piece of each until she gets used to it.
- Switch to uncured chicken hot dogs, but keep the usual bun, toppings, and sides.
- Start Sunday with peanut butter-banana waffles rather than sausage and scrambled eggs.
- Sub minced mushrooms for some of the beef you use in homemade burgers. They'll taste juicier. Plus, your kid will still have room in his red-meat "allowance" for a slice or two of bacon on another day.
- Order Chinese takeout with tofu instead of meat. The sauces will flavor up the plant protein.



2

Build a grocery plan for your busy life.

Staggering fact: Up to 40 percent of food purchased in the U.S. ends up in the trash. Even if you think there's no way your family tosses that much, you probably waste more than you'd like to admit. But you don't have to turn leafy carrot tops into pesto or go out of your way to use up other veggie scraps. Some little steps can make a big dent in the waste heap.

- **Make a grocery list and a meal plan.** Sounds obvious, but it really can keep quantities in check and prevent impulse buys.
- **Cook the most perishable foods first.** When you're plotting the week's meals, assume your kids will announce they're not hungry one night or you'll have to work late or a school project will steamroll your evening—and plan to use up fresh food before the chaos of the week strikes. I make fish or poultry the day I shop, for instance, and I save the ingredients with the longest shelf life for meals later in the week. Baked sweet potatoes loaded with canned black beans, shredded cheese, lime mayo, avocado, and green onions would be just as good on Thursday as Monday.
- **Check on your perishables midweek.** If there are foods you know you just won't get to, put them in the freezer. A half loaf of sandwich bread, a container of hummus, even eggs (as

long as you scramble them first) can all be frozen, says Dana Gunders, author of *Waste-Free Kitchen Handbook*.

- **Designate a Leftovers Night every week.** Reheat that soup, or pull together random leftovers to make a smorgasbord. (If you don't have enough for a full meal, supplement with staples from the pantry like pasta and beans.) Make a theme of it: I've heard of Waste-Less Wednesday and Stir-Fry Friday.
- **Keep fruits and veggies front and center.** Making produce more visible in the fridge means you'll be more likely to pack it in lunches or offer it at snacktime before it gets moldy. (How often have you kicked yourself for buying pricey berries and not eating them because they sprouted fuzz?) Likewise, place a bowl on the table with apples, pears, grapes, and other fruit you don't need to refrigerate so they are all within easy grabbing distance.
- **Support your local food pantry.** Many will happily accept those packaged granola bars the kids swore they'd eat (but decided that they didn't like) or extra salad dressing you have because a sale enticed you to buy in bulk. And sign up your family to volunteer every now and then; it'll help the kids learn not to take food for granted.



3

Dial down the plastic.

We're way behind other countries in ditching single-use plastics—stuff like straws, little bags, water bottles, and containers that we use once and then toss. *National Geographic* crunched the numbers and found that most American shoppers use one plastic bag a day, whereas people in Denmark use four a year. And the U.S. recycles only 9 percent of its plastic trash. That surfeit of plastic leaches toxic chemicals into the ground from whatever landfill it winds up in, or into the ocean, where it harms fish and their habitats. We don't have to aim for perfection, just a smaller reliance on single-use products most of the time. The supermarket is a great place to start.

HACKS FOR A PLASTIC-FREE SHOPPING RUN

- Keep extra reusable bags in your car trunk. You won't have to remember to take them when you leave the house, and they'll always be at the ready for impromptu supermarket runs.
- Buy more whole unpackaged produce. And instead of pulling a plastic bag from the roll, bring your own mesh bag.
- Shop the bulk bins for your kid's snacks. (Check out page 12 for ideas.) When you do need to buy a packaged item, opt for a large bag or box rather than single-serve portions that use more plastic. Pack to-go snacks in reusable stainless-steel containers instead of plastic bags.
- Rather than buying bottled water, keep a pitcher of tap water in the fridge to serve with meals. (And make carrying a refillable water bottle as much of a habit as carrying your phone.)
- Skip the plastic utensils when bringing home prepared foods.

4

Enjoy dairy. Just try not to overdo it.

Milk, cheese, and yogurt have about the same impact on the planet as poultry (less than beef but more than vegetables and legumes). The goal: Don't exceed the USDA-recommended amount of 2 cups daily for toddlers, 2½ cups for kids ages 4 to 8, and 3 cups for everyone else. If your child is a big milk drinker, try to gradually incorporate more water at meals and snacks. You can win over reluctant water drinkers with floating fruit slices or by switching to sparkling water.

5

Make smarter seafood picks.

If you're not sure what to choose, stick with wild salmon, farmed mussels, or rainbow trout. These are my current seafood go-tos, meeting three criteria from the Environmental Working Group: They're sustainably sourced, rich in healthy omega-3 fatty acids, and low in mercury. If you have time to explore more choices, download the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch mobile app for a state-by-state list of good picks. On packaged fish, look for labels from the Marine Stewardship Council or Aquaculture Stewardship Council to give you peace of mind.



EXTRA CREDIT

PROTECT THE LAND

The earth's soil is a precious resource, yet we're losing it at a rapid rate. Adopting some better shopping habits can help prevent erosion.

- **Buy certified organic when you can.** Doing so helps minimize pesticide use on farms. Given that organic produce can be pricier, the Environmental Working Group maintains a list of produce grown with the most and least amount of chemicals to help guide the picking and choosing. (One easy-to-remember rule: If you eat the skin, buy organic.)
- **Chat at farmers' markets.** Ask growers if they rotate crops and use other "regenerative agriculture practices." Even if they don't, you'll make clear these things are important to customers.
- **Be wary of palm oil.** Many packaged foods, from nut butters to breads, contain it. Producing palm oil has caused deforestation, which contributes to soil erosion. Look for brands that promote sustainably produced palm oil, or don't use any at all.



MAKE YOUR OWN VEGGIE BURGERS! Scan this code with your phone's camera for a recipe (no app needed).

Sophie Egan is the author of *How to Be a Conscious Eater: Making Food Choices That Are Good for You, Others, and the Planet* (Workman, 2020).