

PALEO LUNCH BOXES: HOW DO YOU KEEP THE FOOD FRESH AND OTHER COMMON FAQs



Dom's Lunchbots Lunch box

1. HOW DO YOU KEEP THE FOOD FRESH FOR LUNCH?

A common question I get asked is how to keep the food fresh for Dom's lunches. One thing to remember is that many adults and children are having chicken (or other type of meat) sandwiches and keeping these in their bags without any issues arising even though they're not using cooling packs. (I'm not advocating this - just pointing out that having chicken or other meat for lunch is not so different!)

In our case **we've come up with the following system**. The food once cooked (in the case of the meat this will usually be the night before*) is cooled on the bench. I aim for no more than 20 minutes (and do what I can do make the meat cool as quickly as possible - like removing from hot dish and spreading out from other hot food). It's then placed as soon as possible in the fridge so that it cools down even faster. This whole operation is a bit of a balancing act between time cooling

on bench (so its not too hot in fridge) and not leaving too long on bench (to allow growth bacteria). I'm sure you all have different techniques and I'd love to hear them so this is just what we've been doing and has been working with no issues for the past couple of years.

The lunch boxes we use are **stainless steel** and regardless of whether or not we make the lunchbox up the night before or the morning I always try to put the lunch box in the fridge overnight so that it's cold to start with as the steel retains the cold for quite some time. (If we haven't made it up night before and forgot to put in fridge then I put in freezer in morning before filling with Dom's lunch.)

Typically we make up the lunchbox each evening using veggies prepared from Sunday and add the meat cooked that evening as well as some fruit and then put the lunchbox in fridge. In morning we take it out of fridge just before we leave and put into the carry bag along with an icepack. In our situation the time from being out of the fridge to being eaten at lunch is not ever more than 4 hours and usually only 3 hours.

Sometimes in the summer if I have given Dom chicken I might ask for his lunch box to go in the fridge at school but this is rare. I find that the combination of the icepack and the chilled lunchbox keeps the food cool (in New Zealand's moderate climate) for the time we need.

The works well for us and has done for the past year or so. However, you will all be in different situations (climate wise as well as how long the time is from leaving home to eating) so you will need to work out what works for you and what you're comfortable with. For sure in an ideal world there would be fridges in every classroom. And I think in the future we will see this.

*We do batch cook up minced meat in advance fairly often. So by this I mean we cook up minced meat with onions and garlic and possibly some herbs but keep it basic and then cool or freeze that mixture. Then will use that mixture for a dinner later in week and obviously the meat then will be heated hot and throughly (with added veggies and/or flavourings) and then cooled as per above for the lunch box. At this time though Dom usually not having mince meat for lunch so it tends to be just dinner leftovers of roasts or grilled meats going in his lunch box.

2. DOES THIS FOOD REALLY SATISFY YOUR CHILD?

Most definitely yes! **The foods in these lunch boxes are generally speaking Paleo inspired and tend to follow a LCHF way of eating (meaning Lower Carb and higher Healthy Fat).** They're very nutrient dense and filling being comprised 2-3 serves of vegetables, 1-2 serves of fruit, a serve of protein and a "treat" being olives or dried banana or a bliss ball made mostly with nuts and/or seeds and coconut oil. The lunch boxes cover Dom for morning tea and lunch. (He has more food separately

for afternoon tea – usually kale chips and and a small apple.)

Most days Dom will finish most or all of his lunchbox. Some days he doesn't eat much. **It never really bothers me either way other than to ask him how he found it so I know if there is something he wasn't liking.** Depending on the food I'm usually able to use leftover for dinner by reheating hot completely through.



PlanetBox Lunch Packed.



Same food on dinner plate to show quantity.

3. DOESN'T IT TAKE AGES TO PREPARE THESE LUNCH BOXES?

Well yes and no. Daily I really do only spend 5 minutes in the morning putting the lunch box together. However, that's only possible because I've prepared beforehand. After over a year of preparing a real food lunch box I've got my preparation and assembly pretty streamlined! I have to because like many of you I'm a busy Mum working a corporate job as well as looking after Dom and running this blog. So I definitely appreciate the need to get the most out of out each day!!

So what's my total time investment for a paleo lunch box? Well I generally do a morning shop at the markets or supermarket on Sunday and then around 2-4 hours preparing food on the Sunday afternoon/evening. If I'm working quickly by myself and not doing any baking it's closer to the 2 hour and certainly can be 1 hour if I need it to be. I usually always have one weeks worth of foods made up in the freezer so if something happens and I can't do preparation on the Sunday we're still OK.* If Dom is "helping" me and/or we're baking then it would be more like 3-4 hours. I store the food in air tight glass containers in the fridge. This means a lot of the food is prepared for the week ahead by Sunday so that on weekday nights meal prep takes 15-30 minutes max.**

* This is generally what happens. **Of course there are always those days or weeks when things don't go to plan and that is when it will get stressful.** There is always something I can find but for sure if you cannot do the earlier prep or miss it and haven't got stuff in the freezer or fridge then it will become hard to make a real food/paleo lunch box! So these are the times when I'll resort to packaged food but it will still be real food just processed to an extent - like kale chips in packet or store bought coconut wraps.

There's no denying that eating real food requires an investment of your time but my thoughts are that it is well worth it as you will reap the benefits back many times over for what you can put in.

**I do spend additional time in the kitchen recipe testing and taking photos for our blog but this is not part of my family meal preparation in general sense.



Meal prep in bulk on a Sunday.

4. IS PALEO SAFE FOR CHILDREN?

Eating “paleo” means eating **REAL FOODS** that are nutrient dense, rich in protein and healthy fats, and low in processed sugar. It means ditching the traditional packets from kids lunch boxes which are generally high in refined wheat and processed sugar as well as containing numerous additives and preservatives. When you eat **Paleo** (or **Primal** which is Paleo with dairy and many people who eat Paleo also do eat dairy) then you naturally usually end up eating **LCHF** (low carb high/healthy fat).

Paleo is not about rigid dogma but a template to find out what works best for the individual. Find out more here about [LCHF](#) and check out [LCHF](#) (low carb healthy fat) which explains the various ways that way of eating can be interpreted.

5. ISN'T THIS WAY OF EATING EXPENSIVE?

I also get asked this a lot. Or more often it's just assumed that this way of eating is expensive. I'll be doing a further post looking into this question in detail but for now **my short answer is that it can be but it doesn't have to be.**

It all depends **what you buy** (organic or non organic, free range or not free range), **where you buy it** from (big supermarket or speciality store, local or imported), **when you buy it** (seasonally or out of season) and **how much you're buying at once** (smaller amounts or in bulk).

It also very much depends on **how good the systems are you've put in place to help you make your food go further and reduce wastage.** I am convinced that it's having a great system that is essential as whether or not you're going to be successful in making these REAL FOOD lunch boxes work for you and your families – both from a time and cost perspective. (And here I'll do shameless plug for our new membership group launching shortly – these systems and information on the best shopping are what we'll be talking about – as well as awesome discounts from real foodie businesses!)

So as I say, I'll be going into more detail on this in future post and looking methodically as much as I can to give you accurate figures broken down per lunch box. I'll also be comparing it to the standard lunch box fare. But **just as an example I've looked back over what we've done this past year and the most usual cost for what goes into one of Chef Dom's Planetboxes would be about NZ\$4.00.** Remembering that Dom tends to have a lot of lunch boxes that do look the same but I

don't put all those up on the blog and what we're showing you tend to be the "fancier" lunches. Also take into account that he generally has a generous serve of free range / organic protein (which is where most of the cost is). **Using free range / organic produce, while preferred, is totally NOT required in order to transition your children to eating a REAL FOOD paleo lunch box.**