

Litterless lunches 101: Energy balls

One of the keys to quick and easy lunch packing is having food on hand that you can grab and toss into your child's lunch box. While making up batches of snacks will take more time than buying a box of similar snacks at the supermarket, you will end up with a healthier and tastier option and no boxes and wrappers to dispose of. I usually spend a couple of hours on alternate week-ends making up batches of healthy snacks that store well in the freezer—muffins, granola bars, etc.—and pack them frozen in the kids' lunch bags. As much as possible, I get the kids involved in making these snacks because they are always more enthused about eating something they have made themselves.

Here is a recipe my kids—and your kids—can make with some help with the food processor. These chocolatey energy balls are delicious, have a handful of real ingredients and are a great alternative to a chewy granola bar from the store. They are sweetened with dates, have a hit of protein from hemp hearts and between the cacao and chocolate chips, taste fantastic. Pack 2 or 3 in a small reusable container for a recess or lunch time treat.



1 cup of rolled oats



7 Medjool dates, pitted Submerge the dates in warm water for about 10 mins before use if they are a little dry. You can find these dates in the produce section of the supermarket, at bulk stores and at Costco.



1/4 cup hemp hearts. Look for these in the health food section at the supermarket or in big bags at Costco.

1 Tbsp Cacao powder, 1 tsp cinnamon, 1/2 tsp salt



3 Tbsp water



1/4 cup mini chocolate chips



← **The final product: magic energy balls!**

1. Pulse the rolled oats 4 or 5 times in the food processor until they are fine but stop before the oats turn into a powder.
2. Add the dates, hemp hearts, cacao powder, cinnamon and salt and pulse again until the mixture is uniform. This can take about 30 seconds or a minute depending upon your food processor. It will resemble small pebbles when it is done.
3. Add the water 1 Tbsp at a time and pulse 2 or 3 times after each addition. Check the mixture after you add each spoonful of water - it is ready when it holds together if you squeeze a bit between your fingers. Finally, add the chocolate chips and pulse a couple of times until they are distributed.
4. Scoop out 1 Tbsp of the mixture at a time and roll into balls. Store in an air tight container in the fridge. Yields about 24 balls.