



Celebrate Earth Day!

EARTH DAY is celebrated each year on April 22nd. The theme for 2024 is “Planet vs. Plastics.” Earthday.org is unwavering in its commitment to end plastics for the sake of human and planetary health, demanding a 60% reduction in the production of ALL plastics by 2040.

Planet vs. Plastics calls to advocate for:

- widespread awareness on the health risk of plastics
- rapid phase out of all single use plastics
- urgent push for a strong United Nations Treaty on plastic pollution
- an end to fast fashion, which utilizes, synthetic fabrics and poor-quality garments, contributing to microplastics in our environment.

Plastics are increasing in production at an alarming rate even while the science behind the health concerns of plastics in our environment challenges the notion that they are harmless. Plastics and microplastics, which are tiny specks of plastic, are everywhere from phone cases, toys, furniture, clothing, food containers, food, household dust, water and even the air we breathe. Plastics and microplastics have been found to be accumulating inside living beings including people.



PLASTIC AND SMALL CHILDREN

Everyone is at risk when exposed to plastics and microplastics but due to the size of babies and the developmental stages’ they go through from crawling, teething and generally putting all kinds of objects in their mouths, small children are exposed at a much higher concentration than adults. Studies suggest babies are ingesting plastics at rates ten times higher than adults.

SILICONE A SAFE OPTION?

Many plastic products used for baking and children’s items such as cups, eating utensils, pacifiers, baby bottle nipples and teething toys are

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Healthy Hydration



Understanding Water and Plastics

It’s important to encourage children to drink water frequently and take water bottles with them when going out. Water bottles made of glass, stainless-steel or other eco-friendly materials are safe, generally longer lasting and environmentally sound. When using plastic water bottles, make sure you understand the type of plastic used.

Plastic containers and BPA

(bisphenol). With the widespread use of plastics, experts are taking a closer look at their possible health risks. The chemicals, **phthalates** and **BPA**, used in making plastic are the most detrimental for human health. More and more plastic products that were once made with **BPA**, **no longer contain it today**.

What are the AAP recommendations for plastic?

Look at a plastic product’s recycling code (at the bottom) and **avoid** those with codes **3** (phthalates), **6** (styrene), and **7** (bisphenols) unless plastics are labeled as “biobased” or “greenware,” indicating that they are made from plants and do not contain bisphenols.

Is my baby bottle BPA free?

Bottles with the code **1**, **2**, or **4** are made of polyethylene and **5** is made of polypropylene. **These plastic bottles do not contain BPA**. The code **7** or the label **PC** (which stands for polycarbonate) is a sign that the bottle likely contains BPA.

Resource: www.aap.org

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now available in silicone. Silicone is not a plastic and does not release microplastics into the environment. Many experts believe silicone to be nontoxic and safe for contact with food and drink. However, silicone is not entirely inert and it is also rarely recycled. When buying silicone products look for high quality, “medical grade” or at least “food grade” products.

CELEBRATING EARTH DAY

Make a pledge to move away from the use of plastics. This may sound overwhelming but starting with some basic, small, manageable steps will help us become more aware and move us in the right direction.

Water

Do away with plastic water bottles. Use tap water and refillable water bottles that are made from stainless steel or glass.

Eating and drinking

Replace plastic utensils, plates and cups with the real deal. It may mean washing a few more dishes but it is the healthier choice. Worried about dishes breaking? Invest in stainless steel plates and cups for children and for outdoor use. Do not opt for plastic straws, simply drink from the cup or purchase paper or reusable straws.

Clothing and bedding

About 69% of the fabric we use is made with oil-based plastics. Buy clothing and bedding made from all natural materials such as cotton, wool, linen, hemp or bamboo, with linen and hemp considered the most sustainable. Choose durable, sustainable or second-hand clothing.

Toys

Commit to buying fewer or no plastic toys and instead choose toys made from wood, bamboo, cotton or wool material, silicone and 100% natural rubber.

Shopping bags

Paper or plastic? Choose paper or bring your own cloth or jute bag.

Food storage

Use glass jars/containers and foil wrap or beeswax wrap instead of plastic baggies and plastic wrap.

Food packaging

Buying in bulk reduces the amount of food packaging used. Scoop food from bulk bins into cloth bags and store in glass jars after getting home. Cook from scratch to avoid take-out packaging, eat whole fruit and always eat your ice cream from a paper cup or cone!

Soaps and cleaning supplies

Use bar soaps, powdered dishwasher detergent and cleaning products as well as laundry detergent sheets, all packaged in cardboard.

This year, in celebration of Earth Day, find one thing or more you can do to reduce the production of plastics to protect your health and the health of those you care for.



Sources: earthday.org, learn.eartheasy.com, mindbodygreen.com

— Catherine Stafford
 Director, Child Health and Nutrition
 CocoKids

KIDS' HEALTH & SAFETY

The Magic of Play

HOW PRESCHOOLERS VIEW THE WORLD

There's a lot that very young children can't yet grasp about the world around them. So they "fill in the blanks" and often make up their own magical explanations for how things work. This special time, which peaks during the preschool years, was dubbed "the magic years" by child development expert Selma Fraiberg.

Babies use their senses (touch, taste, smell, sight and sound) to explore their world. As they develop, they begin to understand how things work ("If I push this button, the pony will pop out of the barn!"). As preschoolers, they take this knowledge and combine it with a growing imagination to come up with fantastical ideas about why and how things happen.

Pretend play lets children try out new roles for themselves (like superheroes, princesses, dinosaurs, wild animals or even parents) and allows for creative problem-solving. But it also helps them deal with another hurdle of the preschool years: intense emotions. Baby dolls might be put in "time out" and scolded for actions suspiciously similar to your little one's latest offense. An imaginary friend (who's a bigger troublemaker than the child ever could be) might be dreamed up to help children deal with feelings of guilt and remorse following a moment of lost control, such as hitting a playmate. Self-control is a tough skill to learn and pretend play helps children practice it as well as play out the frustration it creates.

ENCOURAGE IMAGINATIVE PLAY

Imaginative play begins in a child's mind. But that doesn't mean adults can't join in. Here are some ways to encourage a child's world of make-believe:

- **Go along with it.** When young ones leap through the air and tell you they're flying, don't tell them they're only jumping. Instead, feed the fantasy: "Wow, you're so high up! What can you see on the ground? Maybe you should take a rest on that nice puffy cloud." Or even better, start flying with them.



- **Choose old-fashioned toys.** Blocks, dolls, arts and crafts, and molding clay are all toys that require creativity and therefore spur imagination.
- **Limit electronic toys.** Whether it's a handheld entertainment system or a "junior" laptop, try to avoid toys that need batteries. Creativity is stifled when the toy, rather than the child, directs the play.
- **Read to children.** While reading, ask mind-opening questions: "If you were the caterpillar, what would you eat?" and "What do you think will happen next in the story?" This not only encourages imagination but promotes language skills and fosters an interest in books.
- **Schedule downtime.** Make sure children have free time every day to play on their own. Aside from encouraging creativity, it teaches them to use their own resources to amuse or soothe themselves.
- **Limit screen time.** When children watch a movie or even an educational program, they experience someone else's make-believe world instead of using their own imaginations. Young children are also influenced by ads because they can't tell the difference between commercials and actual programs. The same goes for digital ads in online games and apps. Limit screen time (which includes TV, DVDs, computers, smartphones and tablets) to no more than 1 hour of quality programming per day for children 2 to 5 years old. When your child does use a screen, take time to watch together.

— Adapted from *Nemours KidsHealth.org*

Green Goddess Buddha Bowl

- Asparagus, fresh, sliced 1 cup
- Baby arugula 2 cups
- Brown rice, cooked 3 cups
- White beans, drained 1 (15 ounce) can
- Avocado 1
- Cucumber, peeled & sliced 1
- Walnuts, toasted ½ cup
- Green Goddess Dressing to taste

1. Blanch asparagus until crisp tender. Divide arugula between 6 bowls. Arrange brown rice, beans, asparagus, avocado, cucumber and walnuts over the top.
2. Serve with Green Goddess Dressing.

Yield: 6 servings

Meets requirement for whole grain-rich and vegetable

— Adapted: American Institute for Cancer Research

Polenta and Lentil Bake

- Onion, chopped 1
- Olive oil 1 Tbsp
- Baby spinach 4 cups
- Basil, fresh, chopped 8-10 leaves
- Marinara sauce 1 jar (28 ounce)
- Balsamic vinegar 1-2 Tbsp
- Polenta, enriched or whole grain, precooked 16 oz tube
- Lentils, cooked 2 cups
- Parmesan cheese, grated ½ cup

1. Cook onion in oil until limp, add spinach and basil tossing in hot pan until wilted. Stir in marinara sauce and vinegar.
2. Layer sliced polenta with sauce and lentils in a medium sized casserole dish. Top with Parmesan cheese. Bake 30 minutes at 350°F or until bubbly.

Yield: 7 servings

Meets requirement for grains, meat/meat alternate and vegetable



Kickin' it in the Kitchen

THE POWER OF PLANTS

Many people are adopting a plant-forward diet for their health and the health of our planet. Plants help us live healthier, longer lives and reduce our risk of chronic diseases.

Plants are also planet-saviors requiring less energy, land and water resources. Embracing more plant foods in the kitchen is an easy way to reduce your carbon footprint and improve your health too.

Change the way you think about meat.

Substitute beans, lentils and soy foods for meat or use meat in small portions for flavor.

Plants should make up half of your plate. Strive to eat 4-5 cups of colorful fruits and veggies daily.

Choose healthy fats. Fats in olives, olive oil, nuts, nut butters, seeds and avocados are healthy.

Have a vegetarian meal at least one night a week. Build these meals around legumes, whole grains and vegetables.

Begin with a whole grain breakfast. Look for 100% whole grains in your bagel, toast and cereal.

Go for the greens. Build a meal around a salad of leafy greens such as kale, chard and spinach.

— Adapted: Harvard Medical School, Daily Harvest



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Food Q. What happened when the Cat in the Hat drank vinegar?
Funny A. He became a sour puss!