

Going (Almost) Plastic-Free in the Kitchen for Kids

from Birth to Teen

by Erin S. Ihde

Whatever the age of your child, chances are he or she seems to eat 24/7. Keeping up with the need to be innovative with meals and make them healthy can be a challenge but what they're served on shouldn't be. With all the buzz about going "plastic-free," I decided to give it a try. Even knowing about the potential dangers of plastics and having tried to cut back at home, I really wanted to see if it's possible to do more. Here's what I learned - this is a great way to create a healthier home and can be done in easy steps:

1. Say good-bye to BPA and other polycarbonate plastics. Polycarbonate is clear, hard plastic (that can be tinted as long as it's still transparent). Think baby bottles, water bottles, disposable party cutlery. As research shows, BPA-free doesn't always mean it's safe. In order to produce polycarbonate plastics without BPA, another chemical has to be substituted. BPS or another "cousin" that looks and acts much like BPA may be just as toxic, if not more so. According to the Environmental Working Group, BPA has

been linked to a wide variety of health effects, including: infertility, breast and reproductive cancer, obesity, early puberty, diabetes, behavioral changes in kids and resistance to chemo treatments. (Also look out for BPA in thermal paper receipts and the linings of food and soda cans.)

2. Avoid PVC plastics. According to the Healthy Building Network, chlorine is needed to manufacture PVC, and burning this plastic at the end of its life cycle creates carcinogenic dioxin. Some PVC plastics contain phthalates to "soften" the product, making it more pliable. Phthalates are endocrine disruptors, which can disturb the body's hormone system. PVC is labeled with a #3.
3. Say good-bye to any scratched, worn or old plastic. Plastic does break down over time. The older and more worn it is, the greater the chance of chemicals leaching into food.

Now, what to do with all this plastic? Check to see what can be repurposed or recycled. And just in case there's

still some hanging around, avoid heating plastic since that's when more toxins are released. For the same reason, avoid putting any plastic in a microwave or dishwasher.

What are some safer options to replace all this with? If it's not in the budget to do everything at once, it can be done in stages. Here are a few ideas to get started:

- **Cups/Glassware:** For kids that have graduated from sippy cups and are old enough to handle “real” glasses, stocking up at a thrift store is a budget-friendly option. Recycled-content glasses are available online at Viva Terra, Bambeo, and at big box retailers such as Pottery Barn. Stainless steel cups or enamelware are other options for kids not yet ready for glassware.
- **Baby Bottles:** As mentioned, bottles labeled BPA-free aren't necessarily safe. BPA substitutes and other chemicals can cause endocrine (hormone) disruption and other unhealthy effects. Stainless steel baby bottles are practical, though pricier. Glass bottles have a range of price points, starting at about \$10 for a 3-pack. Options from the big box stores include: Avent, Evenflo, and Gerber, along with a version that includes a silicone sleeve from companies such as Dr. Brown's, LifeFactory and Green Sprouts. Even some larger grocery stores sell glass bottles.
- **Sippy Cups:** Stainless steel versions are available from Thermos and Klean Kanteen. Glass options are available from LifeFactory, too.
- **Dishes:** For a busy home, sturdy dishes that go from dishwasher to oven to table work great. However, most of the china in stores is...made in China. Fiesta Ware is affordable, domestically made, and lead-free. HF Coors is another option.
- **Food Storage:** For keeping bulk items such as rice, oatmeal and snacks; glass storage containers are readily available everywhere from the grocery store to mass retailers. For storing leftovers in the fridge, Pyrex works, as does Fiesta Ware (the plates fit as lids for the

bowls). Avoiding plastic wrap, especially for heating foods, will save money and is healthier.

- **School Lunches:** Stainless steel lunch containers are durable for any age child, as are glass “cubes” with spill-proof lids (be careful for breakage). Purchasing stainless steel containers is an investment, but without having to buy any disposable zip-top bags, it saves money in the long run. Bamboo forks and spoons come in kid-friendly sizes, but a word of warning: these need to be hand-washed and dried well. Keep stainless steel spoons on hand (from thrift stores or garage sales – not the good stuff!) to send to school instead of plastic spoons.
- **Water Bottles:** With sports and camping trips, there can never be enough of these. This is another purchase that pays off, because there's no need to buy juice boxes or bottled water. Stainless steel bottles should be marked 18/8 or 18/10, indicating a good quality bottle. Glass options from companies such as LifeFactory are practical with a silicone sleeve.

Whatever the age of your child, getting healthier in the kitchen by going (almost) plastic-free can be an affordable and easy switch.

Note: Information provided herein is not intended to treat or diagnose any health condition. As always, consult your healthcare provider with any questions or health concerns.



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