

back to school? no worries



28 stress-free days to look forward to!

Lazy summer days are coming to an end...your routine's about to get a whole lot busier. Relax! We've got what you need to help kids head into fall with confidence and help you manage time, space, spending and stress.



Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

2 weeks before school

Take inventory. Make a checklist of what you and your child need to get back to routine and shop the summer sales. If the budget is tight, just buy enough to get through the first few weeks, says Kim Danger, founder of Mommysavers.com.

Stock up on school supplies and organizing materials. Having what you need before the rush helps lower the stress when you get back to the busy routine, says learning specialist Jill Lauren, MA, of New York City.

Clear your own schedule for the week school starts in case you have any last-minute errands to take care of.



Avoid "morning madness." Vow to make getting off to school and/or work a lot easier. Sign permission slips, pick clothes, and pack homework assignments, backpacks, lunches and snacks the evening before.

Don't forget the fun! Plan to occasionally include fun foods in your lunch boxes every once in a while. "For my son, I add a couple of mini-chocolate chips to a snack mix made of more nutrient rich options like Cheerios, raisins and pretzels," says registered dietician Regan Jones.

Prep a special place to store Box Tops for Education squares. Involve the family in earning money for schools. ...don't let any Box Tops go unclipped. Pssst! This year, Box Tops for Education launches a program with double coupons on specially selected packages!

Set up a routine to help you and your child get ready to getting back on schedule. A "chore chart" can be helpful, as well as a timer to keep tasks within a certain time frame. TIP: On-Task On Time, created by Moschel Kadokura, mother of triplets, is available at www.timelymatters.com.

1 week before school

Stick with a budget. \$300 will buy: four \$30 pants, six \$20 shirts and two pairs of \$30 shoes. If you or your child is set on something more expensive, give them a choice of fewer items or ones that cost less than average, says Kim Danger of Mommysavers.com.

Stock up on critical supplies for projects, such as construction paper, poster or foam boards, and lettering stencils, says professional organizer Debby Lea of streamlinedsolution.s.ca. They'll come in handy when your child announces the project is due tomorrow!

Relax! Set your clock to wake up earlier in the morning and have a good breakfast. Get emotionally balanced with a little quiet time.



Make dairy a lunchbox fave. "Research shows that flavored milk and flavored yogurt are good choices because they tend to replace nutrient-poor options, like soda, candy and chips," says registered dietician Regan Jones. Yoplait, for example, includes 9 essential vitamins and minerals.



Liven up lunch on the run. Use a cookie cutter to transform a plain square sandwich. Check out your party supply store for discontinued packs of decorative napkins on sale; select favorite characters, themes and holidays.

Nix "nothing to wear" syndrome. Get outfits ready for the entire week by using a hanging sweater shelf to store complete looks in each of the slots. Include shoes, belts and hair accessories when practical, says Kim Danger of Mommysavers.com.

Enjoy lazy Sunday mornings with two-minute breakfast smoothies. Whip one up with fruit juice, ice and Yoplait yogurt. Add Cascadian Farms organic fruit straight from the freezer to make it berry delicious. (They're great as after-school snacks too!)

1st week of school

Don't shop...swap! Organize a clothing swap with other families for both kids and adults. Exchange last season's outgrown clothes for back-to-school items that fit. Or find collections in your child's size ready to be sent to you for a small membership and shipping fee at thredup.com.

Choose a backpack with wide cushioned straps to evenly distribute weight on shoulders, and waist straps to help stabilize the load. The loaded backpack should be no more than 15 percent of one's body weight.

Plan lunches you can prep the night before. Tuna salad or turkey chili in a container, a whole-grain pasta and veggie toss, or even a turkey wrap with mayo on the side won't get stale or soggy by the next afternoon, says registered dietitian Diane Henderiks.



Serve veggies for breakfast. Make an omelet using leftover vegetables, suggests Brenda J. Ponchitera, registered dietician and author of *Quick and Healthy Recipes and Ideas*. Top them with Old El Paso salsa for a flavor and fiber boost.

Be an all-star on sports night. Plan ahead for those evenings when a game or practice leaves just minutes on the clock for dinner prep. Serve Wanchai Ferry frozen Chinese entrees and score points for speed and flavor.



Pack snacks for the weekend, global-style. Americans are discovering the Japanese Bento box as a healthy lunch alternative, says Shannon M. Carino, of bentolunch.blogspot.com. Try including a hard-boiled egg, cheese squares, applesauce, Chex Mix, grape tomatoes and water. Find bento boxes and more at easylunchboxes.com

Cut your lunch-making time for the week ahead in half by assembling what you need, from bread and meats to wrapping materials and utensils, the night before. The next morning, spread them out on the counter in the order you will use them.

2nd week of school

Why pay retail? Think resale. Many consignment boutiques around the country specialize in clothes of all sizes and stock the trendy brands both kids and adults love. Unload your family's castoffs and trade up to the next size for a fraction of what you'd pay at department stores.

Trade the brown bag for an insulated lunch box and freezeable ice packs. Both help keep lunches fresh and appetizing longer and minimize the chance of food poisoning. Check the stores at Bettycrocker.com, Pillsbury.com and Cooking.com for ideas.

Feed the brain with protein and whole grains. Multi-grain cereal choices like Cheerios, Chex and Wheaties provide energy, stabilize insulin levels and reduce stress. A breakfast of oatmeal, multi-grain pancakes, whole wheat toast, Yoplait yogurt or eggs also help keep the mind focused.

Don't forget the variety of low-fat spreadable cheeses that can be substituted for mayonnaise and margarine on sandwiches. For crunch, try alfalfa sprouts, cucumber, celery and pickles, packed separately to prevent wilting.



Double-task after dinner by setting the breakfast table after clearing the dishes from supper.

Pack foods on the go that are fuss-free. Think orange slices instead of a whole unpeeled orange, suggests dietician Regan Jones.

Check in. Many children worry that they won't get good enough grades to please their parents, or that their peers won't see them as good enough to be considered a friend. The most important thing a parent can do to help lessen the

stress is to just listen to their kids.

