



THE WELLNESS MAMALAH

BY JENNIFER WISE

Making Good Choices On Purim Day

Can I share my Purim secret with you?

Hint: It's not about how I dream up elaborate matching costumes and *mishloach manot* themes for my whole family (I don't. We keep it simple). Nor is it about how I have my *hamentaschen* baked and ready to be stored in the freezer two weeks after Chanukah. Instead, my secret is about how I, the mommy of the family, get through the whole day of Purim without shoving every single Hershey's miniature that comes through my door straight into my mouth. That's right, without eating them all.

I'd very much like to eat them all. My brain tells me to eat every last one of them, and my heart kind of agrees too. But the buttons on my skirt don't. I hate the buttons on my skirt. But sadly, they are a good barometer of how things are going for me nutrition-wise, so I do listen to them.

Are you ready?

I make myself *fleishig* first thing in the morning. As in, right after I wake up. For me, I drink a cup of warm chicken soup but, honestly, it can be any meat item, anything that won't make you nauseous but will make you *fleishig* – for a whole six hours. Delicious chocolate bars can (and will) pile up around me on the dining room table and there's not a thing I can do about it. It's not about depriving myself, it's about knowing myself – and I know that I cannot have just one piece of milk chocolate. I am an all-or-nothing girl and I am not ashamed to stand up and say, "My name is Jen, and I have a chocolate problem." Because I do. But once I drink my soup, it's all over. I don't have to spend the day thinking about how much I want some. I just know that I cannot have any. Anxiety gone. And my chocolate problem? Done with.

I've come to learn that life is all about making good choices, and I stress that a lot with my kids. We try hard to eat healthy in our house, but there is always room for a treat, especially on a special day like Purim. It's taken years, but I think my children (and husband)

finally understand that it's perhaps not the best idea to immediately tear into every single *mishloach manot* that arrives, the second that it arrives. It can also be fun to open each one and make a pile of snacks that you really love and don't usually have because those treats are worth it. A bag of plain potato chips? Please. Those are not special in the least. A mint-chocolate brownie sent over by neighbors who *only bake these once a year*? Now we have something to talk about.

I struggle a lot with the idea of filling bags with junk food that I know I wouldn't give to my own kids and then handing them out to other families. The past few Purims, we've changed the way we give *mishloach manot* and we tend to give out foods that can be eaten for lunch on a very hectic day.

Some real food *mishloach manot* ideas for which we have gotten very positive feedback are:

1. A container of vegetable soup, a few garlic knots and a giant homemade cookie.
2. A mason jar, with layers of rainbow-colored vegetables and a small container of a healthy salad dressing.
3. A tin filled with Israeli salad, falafel balls, techina, pickles and sauerkraut.
4. A whole-wheat bagel with cream cheese or tuna, tomatoes and a drink.

Real food *mishloach manot* tend to be messier because they are more of a meal, so don't forget to include a few



plastic utensils and a napkin or five. And maybe a bottle of water to wash it all down with.

But let's get real for a second. Purim is around the corner. If you'd like to use some variation of any of these ideas or if you haven't started putting together your *mishloach manot* yet or even if you'd like to change what you do have into a more healthy idea or theme, you're going to be pressed for time. And that's okay because filing these ideas for next year and taking a healthy shortcut this year is totally okay. Shortcuts are our friend. And do you know what else is our friend? Costco. That's right. One trip to Costco (or any other big-box type store) and your very-easy-very-quick real food *mishloach manot* will be done in no time at all.

I took a trip to Costco yesterday, and all of these food items were just sitting there on the shelves, waiting to be brought home and (quickly) turned into your favorite *mishloach manot* theme, with minimal effort on your part:

1. *The Israeli*: Mini packets of baby carrots, single-serve containers of

chumus, snack bags of pita chips and extra large jars of olives, just waiting to be portioned out into snack size bags.

2. *The Lunchbox*: Snack packs of whole grain crackers, string cheese, single-serve edemame packs and a seedless clementine or two.

3. *The Dip Trio*: Individual containers of salsa, chumus and guacamole, snack-size bags of whole-wheat pretzels and a few mini cucumbers.

4. *Hippie Healthy*: A single-serve full fat plain yogurt, with mix-ins like a snack size bag of nuts, mini chocolate chips or a small box of granola.

5. *The Fruit Tree*: Pre-packaged sliced apples, dried apricots, squeeze apple-sauce packs and a bag of plantain chips.

Packaging your healthy *mishloach manot* does not have to be time-consuming or expensive either because brown paper lunch bags are your friend. They're certainly mine, especially because they come in packs of 100 for as little as \$1.99.

So much can be done with the humble paper bag, and a little stroll through Pinterest will open a whole new world of packaging ideas. Presentation is everything and some of my favorites include:

1. Folding the top over, punching two holes through the bag and threading a wide pretty ribbon through the holes and tying a large bow.

2. Printing a Purim poem on mailing labels and using each one to seal the bag closed.

3. Gathering the top of the bag together and closing it with a rubber band, and then covering the rubber band with some ribbon and threading the stem of a tissue paper flower through the rubber band.

4. Turning each bag into a Purim character using shapes cut out of construction paper.

5. And the easiest – just handing my kids a stack of bags, a box of markers and a bunch of stickers and letting them have at it.

I love Purim. I used to love it because it was a day of unlimited Hershey kisses, even though I knew the day would end with a stomachache. Now I love Purim because I've learned to make smart choices, and I no longer have to look at the day after Purim as the day to start a diet all over again. Now Purim is just a day, because making good food choices is #lifestyle #notadiet.

