

Back To School Lunches and Snacks

The fall is a busy time of year. When it comes to what you will pack in your child's lunch, packaged or convenience foods may seem like the best choice when you are in a rush. However, foods like soda, chips, cookies and high fat lunchmeats (salami, bologna) have too much fat, sugar, sodium, and total calories. Over time, eating these foods frequently can lead to long-term health problems like high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity. Extra calories and sugar can also cause children to feel sluggish or cranky in the afternoon while children who eat more nutritious foods tend to do better in school. Help them reach their full potential by packing them a good old-fashioned "brown bag" lunch that includes a variety of foods from different food groups to help provide them with the energy and nutrients they need to grow, play, learn, and stay healthy.

To make a lunchbox lunch more appealing for your children, let them help select and prepare their meals. This way, they are more likely to eat their lunch because they feel invested in the process. A bonus for you as the parent is that if your child is involved in the food prep, they can help you clean it up as well. For example, let your children shop for, clean, peel, and/or cut up fruits and veggies (if they are old enough). Let them select the dinner vegetable and then pack the leftovers in their lunch box for the next day.

Basics of a Healthy Lunch Box:

In every lunch, try to include...

- One serving of vegetables and one serving of fresh fruit.
- One serving of low-fat or fat-free milk or other source of calcium such as a string cheese, low fat yogurt, or low-fat cottage cheese.
- One protein source such as lean chicken, turkey, or ham, beans, peanut butter, or nuts.
- A healthy drink such as water or 100% juice.

<u>Typical Lunch</u>	<u>Nutritional Upgrade</u>	<u>Why it's Better</u>
Bologna sandwich on white bread	Lean turkey sandwich on whole grain bread	Less fat and more fiber
Mayonnaise	Lettuce and mustard	Less fat and fewer calories
Potato chips	Carrots and celery with low fat dip	Less fat plus a serving of vegetables
Fruit cup in light syrup	Any fresh fruit	Less sugar, fewer calories, and fiber
Cookies	Homemade trail mix	Less fat, more fiber, plus protein
Fruit punch drink	Skim milk	Fewer calories, less sugar,

Lunch Box Ideas:

- If your kids get bored of regular bread for their sandwiches, try using a whole-wheat pita pocket, whole grain flatbread, or whole grain tortillas.
 - Examples:
 1. Make a mini sandwich with tuna or egg salad on a dinner roll.
 2. Stuff a whole grain pita pocket with ricotta cheese and Granny Smith apple slices and top with cinnamon.
 3. Roll turkey or ham, low-fat cheese, and lettuce into a whole grain tortilla.
- Use cookie cutters to cut sandwiches into shapes.
- Substitute a banana or thin slices of apple for jelly on a peanut butter sandwich.
- Pack a salad! Start with a base of dark greens then load up bright veggies such as bell peppers, tomatoes, broccoli, and cucumbers.
- Add protein by topping the salad with nuts, hardboiled eggs, beans, or leftover grilled chicken.
- Make the salad more interesting by adding fruit (such as dried cranberries or raisins, mandarin oranges, apple or pear slices, or seasonal berries), low-fat cheese, or low-fat/baked croutons.
- Let your child choose his or her favorite (low-fat) dressing and pack it in a separate container so the salad doesn't get soggy.
- Make a cold pasta salad from leftover whole-wheat noodles and your child's favorite vegetables with a light Italian dressing.
- Mix plain brown rice with canned beans and/or shredded lean meat.
- Pack hummus as dip the kids can use for raw veggies and pita chips.
- Make the main entree a fruit plate by cutting up seasonal fruit and pairing it with low-fat yogurt or cottage cheese.
- Put leftover homemade soup or low-sodium canned soup in a Thermos to keep it warm until lunchtime. Throw in some multigrain crackers to go with it.
- Make a rice bowl with brown rice, vegetables, and last night's leftover meat.
- Use seasonal fruits to make a big batch of fruit salad to use in lunches for the rest of the week.
- Make snack kabobs by putting cubes of low-fat cheese and grapes on pretzel sticks.

Don't Forget Lunch Box Safety!!

If lunches are not refrigerated, after about 2 hours the food can begin to grow harmful bacteria that cause food borne illnesses. Always remember to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

- Wash your hands before you prepare the lunch.
- Use a thermos for hot foods
- Use cold packs or freeze some foods and drinks (like milk or juice) overnight, then use them as an ice pack in the lunch the next day.
- Wash out lunch boxes every day or use brown paper bags that can be recycled.
- Toss in some moist towelettes to remind kids to wash their hands before eating and to clean up after.

Planning Lunches that are Healthy for the Environment:

- Laminate your shopping list or put it in a plastic sleeve. If you frequently purchase the same foods at the grocery store, you can mark your foods off with a dry-erase pen then clean it off before your next trip. Leave room on the list to add special foods for the week. This is also a good way to ensure that they nutritious, healthy foods will get bought.
- Buy a re-usable lunch box or re-usable shopping bag for the kids to take their lunch in instead of brown or plastic bags. Also, use Tupperware containers instead of plastic bags. These will save you money over time and reduce waste.

Healthy After-School Snacks:

- “Ants on a log”: spread peanut butter on celery sticks and top with raisins.
- Trail mix: mix your child’s favorite cereal(s) with dried fruit, nuts, and pretzels.
- Yogurt parfait: top low-fat vanilla yogurt with low-fat granola or dry cereal and add some fresh or frozen fruit like strawberries or blueberries.
- Apple slices and peanut butter to dip them in.
- Sprinkle grated Parmesan cheese on popcorn.
- Baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, broccoli pieces, cucumber slices, bell pepper slices, sugar snap peas and/or celery and low-fat ranch dressing to dip them in.
- Dip animal crackers, graham crackers, or a granola bar in low-fat pudding.
- Cubes of low-fat cheese or low-fat spreadable cheese and multigrain crackers.
- Baked tortilla chips and salsa or bean dip.
- Unsweetened applesauce cups.
- Mini rice cakes and peanut butter.
- Peel a banana and dip it in yogurt, then roll it in crushed cereal and freeze it.
- Microwave a small baked potato and top with reduced-fat cheese and salsa.
- Toast a whole grain frozen waffle and top with low-fat yogurt and sliced peaches.
- Make a smoothie with low-fat milk and your child’s favorite fruit.
- Make a quesadilla with reduced-fat cheese and a corn tortilla and top it with salsa and reduced-fat sour cream.
- Top instant oatmeal with dried fruit and chopped nuts.
- Mix peanut butter and cornflakes together, shape them into balls, and roll them in crushed graham crackers.
- Toast an English muffin, spread on pizza sauce, and top with low-fat mozzarella cheese.