

HEALTHY SACK LUNCH OPTIONS

Many parents face the challenge of what to pack in their children's school lunchboxes. Balanced, healthy lunches are often sacrificed for the convenience of pre-packaged foods, but this does not have to be the case! Here are some tips on how to pack a quick, easy, affordable, and HEALTHY lunch your kids will want to eat:

General Tips

- Balance, Variety, and Moderation are key! Make a shopping list of options by food group: grains, vegetables, fruits, protein, dairy, and others. Be sure each lunch covers all groups.
- Let your children help plan and pack lunches to provide a sense of accomplishment and ownership over their food.
- Freeze juice boxes or water bottles ahead of time to keep lunches cool.
- Limit the number of salty, high fat, and high sugar items.
- Use reusable containers to reduce waste.
- Include a taste of home – cut sandwiches into a heart shape or write a note to your child.

Sandwiches

- Choose breads with whole grains for added fiber, such as whole wheat, raisin, rye, bran, oatmeal, or multi-grain. Be sure to read the label carefully – not all dark breads are whole-grain.
- Keep things interesting by varying the type of bread – try pita pockets, rolls, English muffins, crackers, bagels, or tortilla wraps.
- Mix and match add-ons. Try lettuce or spinach, tomatoes, sprouts, cucumbers, peppers, onions, carrots, hummus, or pesto spreads in addition to meats and cheeses.
- Make classic PB&J using peanut butter with no added sugar and natural jelly or real fruit pieces such as banana or apple slices.

Sandwich Alternatives

- Salads made from green lettuce and topped with hard-boiled egg pieces, ham or turkey, tomatoes, carrots, peas, etc. Include dressing in small container on the side.
- Yogurt cups with a side of granola and berries or dried fruit.
- Fruit, veggie, and cheese platter – pack cubes or slices of assorted low-fat cheeses, apple slices, grapes, berries, carrot sticks, celery, or broccoli. Pack with a side of peanut butter or ranch dip, if desired.
- Beans are a great source of protein: send a side of bean dip or hummus along with whole grain chips or crackers.
- Use leftovers! Pack last night's chili or soup in a thermos or send leftover pizza or pasta.

Sides

- Be sure to check juice box labels and choose those with 100% juice and no added sugar. Milk and water also make good alternatives to sugary drinks.
- Include fruit in every lunch: try fruit cups in 100% juice, applesauce with no added sugar, raisins or other dried fruit, melon slices, or whole fruits such as apples, bananas, oranges, or pears.
- Send a side of nuts or seeds, low-fat cheese sticks, or a hard-boiled egg for added protein.
- Add "hidden" nutrients to your kids' favorite sweets: banana or zucchini bread, carrot cake, black bean brownies, or oatmeal cookies.

Additional Resources:

- <http://www.extension.org/pages/29723/what-can-i-pack-my-kids-for-lunch>
- <http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/features/15-fresh-brown-bag-lunch-ideas>
- http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8913826/ns/health-kids_and_parenting/#.TtfnQXN5Dol
- <http://lancaster.unl.edu/factsheets/236-95.htm>