

Healthy Lunch Tips

Make the Grade with Lunch

The most nutritious lunches include foods from at least three food groups, but that doesn't mean children must have the traditional sandwich, fruit, and milk for good health. As long as kids eat a balanced and varied meal, it's perfectly fine to pack hummus, whole-grain crackers, and yogurt or leftovers from last night's dinner every day, as well as sandwiches.

Get Kids Involved

Allowing children to choose and prepare their own lunches it is more likely kids will eat their own creations. Let your child help make lunch the night before school for greater ease in the morning.

Make sure you have healthy foods on hand for your child to choose:

- Peanut and almond butters
- Light canned tuna fish
- Raw vegetables that can be cut into slices
- Fruits
- Encourage the kids to make sandwiches with whole-grain breads or bagels; tortillas; or colorful wraps.

For even greater buy-in:

- Consider insulated lunch bags with room for a small freezer pack that allows you to send foods that must be kept cold, such as dip for fresh vegetables, yogurt, and juices.
- Use larger lunch bags to avoid squishing foods.
- Have on hand small sturdy plastic containers for cut fruit, vegetables, dip, and lunch foods other than sandwiches.

Practical Lunch Tips:

A sandwich made with lean meat, light tuna fish, or peanut butter and jelly; fruit or vegetables; and milk or 100% juice is a fine meal for a growing child's lunch. You can boost nutrition and tantalize a child's taste buds by adding shredded carrot, chopped celery, or water chestnuts to egg salad or tuna salad. And don't forget this popular standby: Adding a sliced banana or apple to peanut butter sandwiches.

Here are some other yummy and easy lunches that use foods from at least three of the food groups:

- Egg salad, whole-wheat bagel, and fruit
- Whole-grain roll with butter or margarine, 2 hard boiled eggs, and carrot sticks
- 8 ounces of low-fat yogurt, whole-wheat crackers, and fruit
- 1-2 tablespoons of peanut butter, whole-grain crackers or bagel, and fruit or vegetables
- 1/2 cup low-fat cottage cheese or hummus, whole-grain crackers, and cherry tomatoes
- 1-2 slices leftover thin crust cheese pizza and fruit or vegetables

What's to Drink?

Milk and fortified 100% fruit juice are the best drinks for children at lunch, in that order. Encourage milk at school by providing milk money or packing containers of milk in the lunchbox. To make it a treat, offer low-fat chocolate milk, occasionally. If your child refuses to drink milk at school, opt for 100% fruit juice fortified with calcium and vitamin D.

Don't Forget Fun:

Every kid will yell for junk food, and an outright ban rarely works. So offer healthier alternatives. Pack these fun foods for a healthy treat:

- Baked potato chips
- Homemade toasted pita bread chips
- Pretzels
- Trail mix or raisins
- Nuts or soy nuts
- A serving of chocolate chips
- Sunflower seeds
- Graham crackers
- Fig bars
- Granola Bars or Cereal Bars