

Packing Healthy Lunches



Smart tips for packing the lunch box

1. Seek wise choices

A healthy well balanced lunch should begin with a selection from as many food groups as you can. Lunch should include a high-protein food, fresh fruit or vegetable, bread or starch, a treat and finally juice, water or milk. Vary the choices daily to bring variety into the lunch.

Kids like a variety in colors, textures and flavors. Colorful foods are more appealing. You will want to pack foods with different textures as well. Plan for both crunchy and smooth textures. Also consider the flavors of foods. Be wary of strong-flavored foods that may smell after sitting in a lunch box for several hours.

2. Plan ahead and stock your pantry and refrigerator

You might want to keep your pantry or refrigerator stocked with these lunch box food suggestions:

- Bread- (Whole Wheat is best, make sure the food label reads "whole wheat")
- Tuna (packed in water)
- Peanut Butter
- Jam, fruit spread
- Canned fruit (mandarin oranges, pineapple, fruit cocktail, peaches, pears)
- Fresh Fruit
- Fresh vegetables (carrots, celery, cucumbers, sweet peppers, cherry tomatoes)
- Dried fruit (raisins, apricots, apples, pineapple)
- Granola, granola bars
- Trail mix
- Dry cereal
- Cheese
- Fruits juice (100% juice)
- Pudding, Jell-O, applesauce, fruit mixes (individual containers)
- Pretzels, graham crackers, popcorn, peanuts
- Cookies (vanilla wafers, fig bars, animal crackers)
- Yogurt

3. Pack the night before & go small

Each night after dinner set out the lunch boxes, plastic containers, napkins, utensils, etc. Then when you are cleaning up after dinner you can plan for the next day lunches and use leftovers when possible. In some cases the entire lunch can be made, put in the lunch box and stored in the refrigerator overnight.

Besides having a child-sized appetite, the lunch period is short. By the time a child finds a seat, talks to his friends and finally pulls out his lunch, there may be less than 15 minutes to eat. Most of a large lunch will probably get thrown out. Children enjoy small amounts of

a variety of foods. So if you provide a main dish that contains some protein, one or two side dishes, a dessert and a drink, that will be plenty to eat.