

Healthy Eating: Lunch Ideas

Having a healthy school lunch is very important as it provides children with the energy to concentrate during class and helps them get the most out of their school day. Good food habits created during childhood will last a lifetime and school lunches are a great way for your child to get hands on experience of healthy eating.

Tips for healthy lunches

Focus on the food groups

A balanced diet includes all the food groups:

1. Fruits and vegetables: 5-7 servings each day.
2. Wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice: 3-5 servings each day.
3. Milk, yoghurt and cheese: 3-5 servings each day for younger children and 5 servings for children aged 9-12 years.
4. Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts: 2 servings each day



Get everyone involved

Letting your child help with making their lunch is a great way to teach them about preparing food and healthy eating. Children are more likely to eat their lunch if they have been involved in making it.

- You could also let your child help when writing the shopping list and planning the week's lunches.
- Take them along on shopping trips where they can choose some healthy foods that they would like to include in their lunchbox. Teach them how to choose fresh, ripe fruit and vegetables.
- Set up a lunch packing station in the kitchen that has everything you need to prepare the school lunches such as water bottles, lunch boxes, chopping board etc. Set aside 15 minutes each evening to prepare lunch for the next day.
- Encourage your child to help out by washing and chopping fruit and vegetables, making sandwiches and salads, and filling their lunch box or water bottle.

Make it fun

- Use small lunch boxes or silicone bun cases to separate fruit/vegetables/nuts/seeds.
- Cut fruit and vegetables into small, manageable, bite sized pieces.
- Use biscuit cutters to cut fruit, vegetables and sandwiches into interesting shapes such as circles, hearts or stars.
- Make fruit or vegetable skewers and include dips such as hummus or nut butter.
- Assemble fruit and vegetables so that they resemble faces, animals or flowers.
- Make it interesting by including foods of varying colours, tastes and textures.

Keep it simple

- Avoid adding salt or processed sauces or dressings which can often be high in fat, salt and sugar.
- Avoid overloading your child's lunchbox as too many choices or flavours can often be overwhelming, particularly when a new food is being introduced.

**You may need to check with your child's school if there are
any foods that are not allowed, such as nuts**

Suggested foods

Choose the following to include in your child's lunch:

Carbohydrates	Protein and dairy	Vegetables	Fruit	Dressings, toppings, dips
Wholegrain bread	Chicken	Lettuce	Apples	Hummus
Seeded, wholemeal bap / roll	Turkey	Baby leaf spinach	Bananas	Croutons
Tortilla wrap (wholemeal)	Tinned fish, e.g. tuna, sardines, salmon	Tomatoes	Berries	Seeds, e.g. sesame, sunflower, pumpkin.
Pitta pocket (wholemeal)	Cooked fish, e.g. salmon, cod, mackerel	Onions	Pears	Nuts e.g. Pine nuts, walnuts, peanuts, almonds
Bagel (wholemeal)	Beef	Peppers	Peaches	Herbs (fresh or dried)
Pasta (wholemeal)	Pork, e.g. ham, bacon, sausage	Cucumber	Plums	Sundried tomatoes
Brown rice	Cheese, e.g. cheddar, feta, mozzarella	Sweetcorn	Dried fruit, e.g. figs, raisins, apricots	Roasted peppers
Cous cous	Milk	Celery	Grapes	Olives
Noodles	Natural yoghurt	Beetroot	Mandarin oranges	Lemon or lime juice
Crackers	Hard-boiled egg	Radish	Pineapple	Olive oil
Rice or corn Cakes	Tofu	Carrot	Melon	Pesto, e.g. basil, tomato
Oatcakes	Lentils	Avocado	Kiwi	Balsamic vinegar
Potatoes	Chickpeas	Green beans	Nectarines	Guacamole
Sweet Potatoes	Beans	Sugar snap peas	Mango	Salsa or relish

Sandwiches

When making sandwiches, use wholegrain bread such as a multigrain sliced pan, wholemeal seeded bap or roll, or brown soda bread. If using mayonnaise, remember to use sparingly.

Try to include foods from each of the food groups. Good sandwich fillers include:

- Salad vegetables - lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, cucumber, red/white/spring onions, sweetcorn, radishes, peppers, avocado
- Cooked meats - chicken, turkey, ham, bacon, sausage, roast beef
- Fish - tinned salmon, tuna, sardines, cooked and smoked
- Cheese
- Eggs

Ideas for sandwich fillings	
Egg mayonnaise, spring onion, lettuce	Peanut butter and sliced banana
Turkey, avocado, red onion, lettuce	Bacon, chicken, lettuce and tomato
Mozzarella, tomato, basil pesto	Cheese, coleslaw and lettuce
Hummus with peppers, tomatoes, grated carrot, cucumber and lettuce	Fish finger sandwich with ketchup or mayonnaise and lettuce
Salami or pepperoni, roasted red peppers, lettuce and cheese	Ricotta cheese mixed with chopped peppers, spring onions and cucumber.
Cheddar cheese, pickle or relish, lettuce, spring onion	Tuna mayonnaise with sweet corn, onion and salad
Sausage, cooked onions and peppers, relish	Ham, white cheddar, tomato, basil pesto
Cooked or smoked salmon, cucumber, cream cheese	Salmon with mixed salad
Feta cheese, grilled onions and peppers	Chicken, sweet chilli sauce, cheese, lettuce
Cream cheese mixed with chives or scallions, grated carrot, lettuce, cucumber and tomato	Tinned sardines mixed with red onion, lemon, mayonnaise, lettuce, cucumber
Chicken, curry mayonnaise (mild curry powder mixed with mayonnaise), lettuce, flaked almonds	Roast beef, cheddar cheese, lettuce, mayonnaise with a little mustard or horseradish mixed in.

Tortilla wraps

Tortilla wraps are a good alternative to sandwiches and many of the same fillings can be used. Wraps are very versatile and can be used in a variety of ways. Take care not to over fill as this can make them difficult for children to eat. Choose wholemeal wraps.

Ideas for wrap fillings	
Chilli con carne, kidney beans, lettuce, guacamole, grated cheese	Cooked peppers and onions, sweet corn, rice and salsa
<i>Quesadilla</i> : Spread salsa over one tortilla, cover with peppers, onions & grated cheese. Put another wrap flat on top. Toast on grill or pan to melt cheese. Eat hot or cold.	<i>Fruit and nut butter roll ups</i> : Spread wrap with nut butter. Add fruits and seeds, e.g. strawberries and sesame seeds. Roll and cut into bite sized pieces.
Pinwheels: Coleslaw/ relish, salad veg, cheese, meat etc. Roll and slice into wheels. Secure with a blunt cocktail stick.	Strips of cucumbers, peppers, grated carrot, and spinach with hummus or cream cheese
<i>Pizza roll ups</i> : Tomato puree/pesto, cheese, basil, pepperoni, peppers. Roll up, slice into wheels, secure with cocktail stick.	Fruit pizza: Add a drop of vanilla extract to cream cheese, spread on tortilla, top with sliced fruit e.g. berries, peach, plum etc.

Pitta pockets

Pitta pockets are another handy alternative to sandwiches, freeze well and are tidy and easy for children to eat. Use fillings of choice or slice into fingers and serve with dip. Avoid overfilling. Choose wholemeal, multigrain pittas.

Ideas for pitta fillings	
Chickpeas, tomatoes, feta, lettuce	Strawberries, bananas, cream cheese, honey, chopped walnuts
Sliced pitta with hummus/ salsa dip and vegetable sticks	Cheese, ham, grated carrot, lettuce, coleslaw
Chicken, Mexican cheese, guacamole, tomatoes, cucumber, sweet-corn.	<i>Pitta pizza</i> : Tomato pesto, cheese, pepperoni, sweet corn, peppers. Melt cheese. Eat hot/cold.
Tuna, sweetcorn, celery, lettuce	Falafel, hummus, tomatoes, cucumber

Salads

Make salads appealing to children by chopping food into small pieces, including a mix of cooked and raw foods and using fresh, colourful ingredients.

When first introducing children to salads, start out with 2-3 ingredients that they are already familiar with such as cooked chicken, lettuce and cucumber. Get your child involved and allow them to put the salad together themselves from start to finish, washing and preparing the vegetables and adding the dressing.

Meat, fish, cheese, beans, peas, pasta and rice can be added to salads to make them more familiar and to add taste and texture, e.g. cheddar or feta cheese, crispy bacon, croutons, toasted nuts and seeds.

Salads are also a great way of using up any leftover cooked meat or fish and vegetables, such as roasted sweet potatoes or carrots, cooked broccoli, salmon, beef, chicken.

Use insulated lunchboxes or cooler bags to keep salads fresh.

Salad dressings and toppings

Dressings and toppings can make salads more exciting and appealing to children.

An easy way to prepare dressings is to use a clean jam jar to mix the ingredients. The basic recipe has three parts oil (e.g. olive, nut or plant oils) to one part acid (e.g. balsamic vinegar or lemon juice).

Add fresh or dried herbs, such as basil, oregano, spices (chilli flakes, pepper, salt, garlic, ginger, mustard), honey or maple syrup. Tomato or basil pesto and flavoured oils, such as rosemary or garlic oil, make useful ready-made dressings.

Let your child help when making and mixing the dressing. Give them a small container that they can use to bring the dressing to school to stop the salad from becoming too wet during the morning.

Seeds and nuts, croutons, sun-dried tomatoes and olives can be used as toppings to add texture and flavour.



Salad ideas	
<i>Pasta:</i> Brown pasta, salad vegetables, meat or fish, dressing (olive oil, lemon), parmesan cheese	<i>Potato:</i> Boiled or steamed potatoes (skin on if baby potatoes), spring onions, iceberg lettuce, celery, mayonnaise, chives.
<i>Noodles:</i> Wholewheat noodles, stir fried vegetables, beef/chicken/ pork/salmon, low salt soy sauce.	<i>Chicken and bacon:</i> Cooked chicken, crispy bacon, lettuce, spring onion, croutons, caesar dressing.
<i>Rice:</i> Brown rice, cooked salmon/chicken, onions, corn, carrots, peppers. Add any cooked vegetables e.g. broccoli, cauliflower.	<i>Beans:</i> Cooked kidney beans/chickpeas/ black beans with chopped peppers, cherry tomatoes, sweetcorn, onions, herbs and lemon or lime juice.
<i>Cous cous:</i> Cous cous, cooked chicken/ham, sweetcorn, peas, grated carrot.	<i>Quinoa:</i> Cook quinoa with curry powder added to the water, then add chicken, sweetcorn, peas, flaked almonds.
<i>Tomato and bread:</i> Cubes of slightly stale bread mixed with chopped tomatoes and basil. Make a dressing with red wine vinegar, olive oil and garlic.	<i>Tuna and egg:</i> Boiled new potatoes, lettuce, green beans, onion, tinned tuna, hard-boiled egg slices. Dress with lemon juice and olive oil.
<i>Greek salad:</i> Lettuce, cucumber, tomatoes, feta cheese, olives. Dress with lemon juice, olive oil and oregano.	Sweet-corn, tomato, avocado, peppers, grated cheese, and cooked meat such as roast beef, pork, chicken.

Fruit

Fruit is an excellent addition to your child's lunchbox. Leave it plain and whole or chopped, unpeeled where possible for a quick and handy lunchbox addition, or prepare it as suggested below.

- **Fruit kebabs:** Cut the sharp ends off some skewers. Stick a variety of fruit onto the skewers: strawberries, pineapple chunks, melon cubes, blueberries, raspberries, kiwi slices work well. Dip the fruit in yoghurt or fromage frais if you wish.
- **Apple and peanut butter wheels:** Cut apples into circular slices, remove core, spread slices with nut butter, add raisins and seeds. If not eating straight away, coat apple slices in a little lemon juice to stop them from going brown.
- **Fruit pizzas:** Spread plain rice cakes or wholegrain bagel with yoghurt, cream cheese or nut butter and top with sliced fresh fruit, e.g. strawberries, bananas, dried fruit and seeds.
- **Fruit salad, yoghurt and granola pots:** In a small jar or lunchbox layer chopped fresh fruit or fruit stewed in own juice, cover with natural yogurt and top with granola, muesli, nuts or seeds
- **Fruit crudites with vanilla cream cheese dip:** Mix a few drops of vanilla extract with cream cheese or marscapone cheese. Sweeten with a little honey if you wish. Use as a dip for slices of pineapple, pear, melon, berries or grapes.
- **Homemade trail mix:** Mix together a variety of unsalted nuts, e.g. peanuts, cashews, almonds, seeds and dried fruit, e.g. raisins, cherries, cranberries. Add some dark chocolate chips if you wish.
- **Pancake roll ups:** *Savoury* - spread cream cheese, pesto or hummus onto pancake, add meat and salad. *Sweet* - mash berries such as strawberries into cream cheese and spread onto pancake. Add fruit and seeds.

