



...News

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A Lighter Lunch Box

**...for school, camp, the pool and
anywhere on the go this summer**

School Lunches

If you are not already packing a lunch for your child it may be time to start. School lunches do not typically offer very healthy options. If your child is used to eating the school lunch everyday and they are reluctant to change, then start with packing their lunch just one or two days a week. If taking lunch is not an option, then look at the school's menu options with your child and discuss which items are the healthier choices.

Gradual Changes

If you are trying to make your child's lunch box more healthy start with one small change and then move onto improving something else. For example if your child is eating peanut butter and jelly on white bread with cookies and juice change to whole wheat bread then move to switching fruit for the cookies or a piece of fruit and half a cookie, and finally water for the juice . Children respond much better to gradual, small changes rather than everything changing at once.

Choose Foods without Artificial Colorings, Flavorings or Preservatives

Some preservatives and artificial flavorings and colorings have been linked to behavior changes in some children, and others have been linked to cancer. There are plenty of manufacturers that provide products with all natural ingredients. Avoid artificial flavorings such as Monosodium glutamate (MSG), disodium inosinate, disodium guanylate; and preservatives such as butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA), butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT).

Choose Whole Grains

Instead of white bread choose whole wheat bread (make sure the word whole wheat is listed as the first ingredient). If they don't seem to care for it at first, keep trying- remember that it might take up to 15-20 times of trying a new food for them to accept it. Also, try switching brands or try a "white" whole wheat which is made from a lighter strain of wheat but provides the same nutrition as traditional whole wheat bread. Try cutting the "new" bread into fun shapes to distract from the different taste- cookie cutters can be a mom's best friend! Or try whole wheat hot dog buns or tortillas for other variations. Whole grain bread provides more fiber and nutrients than white, refined, heavily processed bread.

Choose Less Pre-packaged Foods

Overall making your own items are healthier, and many times it is cheaper if you prepare these types of items yourself. For example instead of pre-packaged cheese and crackers or peanut butter and crackers try making your own with whole grain crackers and natural peanut butter. Nutritionally and economically you will come out ahead!

Skip Sweet Beverages and Limit Juice.

If your child is in the habit of taking juice everyday for lunch, try changing it up for water a few days a week. If your child is drinking any other sweet beverages definitely work on changing those over to water.

Try Snack Mixes

These can be a very healthy option at lunch IF you make them yourself from low-sugar cereals (less than 8 grams per serving), dried fruits, unsalted nuts, pretzels, and baked crackers.

Try Fruits and Vegetables in a Variety of Ways

Never underestimate the power of fun shapes for a child. Try melon balls instead of cubes, fruit kabob (be sure to use a non-sharp stick such as a caramel apple stick), use a pastry wheel to cut the tops of apple wedges for a fun edge, carrot chips instead of baby carrots- and any other creative shapes!

Add a yogurt dip, dressing, hummus or bean dip for fun dipping.

Mini is Better

Children tend to like food items that come in small packages. So think mini muffins, mini melon balls, small sandwich buns, or cut sandwiches into small shapes.

Other Fun Ideas

Choose a theme for your child's entire lunch to keep lunch food from becoming monotonous. A few examples include: cube day, round day, stick day, color day, ethnic theme, backward lunch, ocean theme, holidays- your imagination is the limit!

Make your own "lunchable". Choose whole grain crackers, cheese and natural lunch meats for your child to assemble. Or make "wheels" by placing ingredients in a tortilla/ wrap, roll it up and slice. Try making a "fruit roll-up"- place cream cheese and fresh fruit on a whole grain tortilla and roll it up.

Hot Lunch

Lunch does not have to be cold or room temperature anymore! Pack a thermos for soup, or macaroni and cheese with vegetables, cooked vegetables, etc. Use instant heat packs to help keep the thermos or other foods warm.

Breakfast Lunch

If your child loves breakfast foods or cereal these can be great lunch options as well (as long as they are healthy options!) Pack a whole grain, low-sugar cereal with skim milk. You can even buy special containers to keep your milk and cereal separate but in the same convenient container. Or try french toast sticks with sweet potato added to the batter.

Lunchtime Economics

If your older child/ teenager is reluctant to start bringing their lunch, then offer them an increased allowance from the extra money they were spending to buy lunch.

Lunch Choice Chart

Make a chart of 5-10 things that your child will eat from these 4 Food Groups. Children respond to change better when they feel they are in control, so work together to come up with their chart. This will also help to make sure you are adding to your child's daily intake of fruits and vegetables and not overloading on starch- which is the area that most children (and adults) get too large of portion sizes. A few days a week slip a healthy "treat" in your child's lunch box.

Examples:

Starch	Protein	Fruit	Vegetable
whole grain bread	turkey (nitrite-free)	tomato slices	carrot chips with yogurt dip
whole grain crackers	peanut butter	apple	celery
whole grain pita	cheese	cantaloupe balls	cauliflower with yogurt dip
cereal	milk	banana	
whole grain crackers	yogurt	strawberries	vegetable soup
"wheels" (whole grain tortilla)	ham (nitrite-free) and cheese	apple slices	corn and black bean salad
zucchini muffin	cream cheese	pear	(zucchini)
pita slices	hummus	peach	cucumber slices
pizza on whole wheat english muffin	(cheese)	orange slices	vegetables on pizza
star cream cheese and avocado sandwiches	(cream cheese)	kiwi	(avocado)

School Lunches

There is a big push right now to make school lunches more healthy. More chefs are moving into helping schools provide healthy but tasty food. There are also initiatives in many school systems to have a more farm-to-school approach, as well as many schools growing their own gardens and in many cases eating that food in the cafeteria. If you want to get more involved in these efforts in your child's school, check out www.thelunchbox.org.

On-line Resources

www.naturalkidz.com

www.laptoplunches.com

www.thelunchbox.org

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