



A Lunchbox Makeover

When it comes to packing school lunches, it can be difficult to meet both of your goals if they are 1) your children will actually eat the lunch, and 2) the lunch will include the right combination of foods to meet their nutrient needs while also providing the energy and stamina they need to get through the rest of the school day.

The supermarkets are flooded with grab-and-go items targeted at kids that are meant to be, or at the very least be part of, a lunch. But many are a far cry from the makings of a healthy midday meal. Of course there's no problem with treats once in a while; what matters most is what's eaten for lunch day to day. Try these tips and pack a lunchbox with confidence. ♣

INSTEAD OF	TRY	WHY
Bologna	Turkey breast or ham	You'll cut the fat from 8 grams per ounce to less than 1. Plus turkey and ham have about one third the calories of bologna.
Premade, prepackaged lunches	Making your own with 1 ounce of turkey breast or ham, 1 ounce of reduced-fat cheese, 4 or 5 whole grain crackers, and some fresh fruit such as grapes	Your child will have a meal with around 200 to 300 calories, 5 grams of fat, and fewer than 600 milligrams of sodium compared with the premade meals, which can contain more than 400 calories, 20 grams of fat, and 800 milligrams of sodium. The differences can really add up over the course of a week. Plus when you make your own, you know the ingredients are fresh.
White bread	Whole-wheat bread, pitas, or tortillas	Not only will you add variety to lunch, you'll boost your child's intake of fiber, protein and, in some cases, iron. If you can't get your kids to try brown bread, try one of the whole-wheat white breads on the market; they'll never know the difference.
Gelatin cups	Fruit cups packed in juice	The gel cups are just pure sugar or, if you use the sugar-free variety, artificial sweetener. With fruit cups, you can give your child a dose of nutrient-filled real fruit.
Potato chips	Whole grain baked tortilla chips	Whole grain baked tortilla chips are an easy way to give your kids a serving of whole grains. Plus they go great with salsa, which can give your kids a bit of veggies, too!
Candy	Homemade trail mix: dried fruit, mini pretzels, whole grain cereal, and chocolate chips	Your kids still get a sweet, chocolaty treat but mixed with a dose of fruit and whole grains to boost the nutrition and cut down on added sugar.
Lemonade, soda, and iced tea	100% fruit juice box or pouch or reduced-fat milk	Trade in 100% sugar and loads of empty calories for real fruit or a big dose of bone-building calcium.
Fruit snacks	Dried fruit such as raisins, apricots, blueberries, cranberries, or cherries	Fruit snacks aren't much more than colored and flavored sugar. Dried fruits are full of fiber, vitamins, and minerals.
Yogurt with candy, cookie bits, or granola sprinkles	Low-sugar yogurts such as Yoplait kids, Gogurt/Simply Gogurt, or Stonyfield Farms squeezable yogurt	Yogurts naturally contain some sugar. But by steering clear of yogurts with these extra toppings, you can cut down on extra sugar.

10 Fresh Ideas for School Lunches

No one wants to eat the same thing day after day, so creating lunches that will wind up in your little ones' bellies instead of their friends'—or worse, the trash—requires a bit of creative thinking. Just keep one simple guideline in mind: Aim for at least one serving from each of these food groups: low-fat dairy, lean protein, grain, fruit, and veggie. And don't forget to get your kids involved, too; they're more likely to eat a lunch they've helped create.

Here are 10 suggestions for tasty lunches that are sure to please:

1) Black bean, corn, and cheese quesadilla: Sprinkle reduced-fat cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese, corn, and black beans on a whole-wheat tortilla and fold in half. Heat a drizzle of oil in a skillet over medium heat. Cook the quesadilla for a couple of minutes on each side until it begins to brown. Cut into wedges and serve with salsa, a 4- or 6-ounce 100% fruit juice box, and a fat-free pudding cup.

2) Reduced-sodium vegetable soup with extra green beans mixed in, reduced-fat string cheese with whole grain crackers, water, grapes, and a fruit-and-cereal bar.

3) Taco wrap: Place two pieces of low-sodium deli-sliced beef, reduced-fat shredded cheddar cheese, shredded lettuce, and salsa in a red or green tortilla. Roll and then package in plastic wrap or foil to keep it together. Pack with pineapple, low-fat milk, and baked whole grain tortilla chips.

4) Tuna salad in a pita pocket, red pepper sticks with hummus dip, yogurt, water, and orange wedges.

5) Top the inside halves of a whole grain English muffin with marinara or pizza sauce, sprinkle with reduced-fat shredded mozzarella cheese, and add any favorite veggie pizza toppings. Bake at 375°F for 5 to 8 minutes until cheese bubbles. Let cool before wrapping. Pack with reduced-fat milk, an apple, and a fruit-in-gelatin cup.

6) Cubes or small square slices of deli turkey or ham, reduced-fat cheese, whole grain crackers, a no-sugar-added fruit-flavored applesauce cup, water flavored with a few lemon slices, and homemade trail mix.

7) Spread sunflower seed butter, such as Sunbutter, and an all-fruit spread on a slice of cinnamon bread. Top with a second slice of bread. Cut using a flower- or star-shaped cookie cutter. Pack with raisins, cucumber slices, reduced-fat chocolate milk, and Goldfish crackers.



8) Egg salad in a mini whole-wheat pita, cherry tomatoes, reduced-fat milk, cut melon, and cinnamon pita chips.

9) Grilled cheese sandwich on whole grain bread with sliced tomato, sweet potato cubes (peel and micro-bake and then cut into cubes), a peach, a no-sugar-added fruit-flavored apple-sauce cup, and a 100-calorie pack of crackers or cookies.

10) Spread refried beans on a whole-wheat tortilla, top with reduced-fat sour cream, reduced-fat shredded cheddar cheese, shredded lettuce, and diced tomatoes for a Mexican roll-up. Roll up and slice. Pack with water flavored with lime slices and a mini banana. 🍌

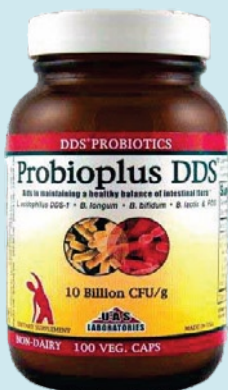
— Heidi Reichenberger McIndoo,
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