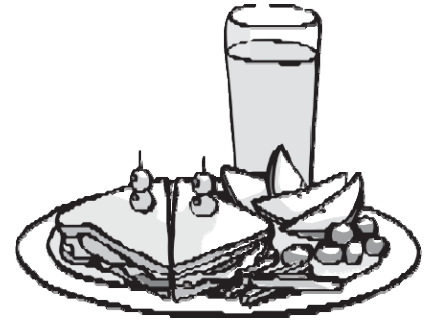


Great Lunch Ideas

It can be a struggle to pack a nutritious lunch for children and youth. It's not easy to find food children will actually eat, and to have it made in time to get the kids off to school. This handout may not reduce all the smashed sandwiches and brown bananas at the bottom of their lunch box, but it may give you some helpful ideas.

We have included some tips on how to prepare healthy lunches, how to get your children to eat them, and how maybe just to liven things up.



How To Prepare A Tasty And Healthy Lunch



- Sit down with your child and see what type of food they like in their lunch. Some kids like hot lunches in a thermos and some love sandwiches
- Some kids like the exact same lunch every day. Some parents have found it helpful to let their child have that lunch 3 or 4 days a week, but then have a lunch that the parents choose on the other days. Or it can help to offer a new food along with a familiar food. This can help to slowly work in other food choices. Remember, sometimes it can take 12-15 attempts before children will like a new food
- To pack a nutritious lunch, aim for it to look like the [Canada Food Guide](#) plate by including: Fruits and Vegetables, Whole Grains, and Protein foods
- Try to stay away from prepackaged foods. Although they are convenient, they are often very high in salt, sugar and fat
- Add a sticker, a joke, or a nice note with a lunch that will make your child smile (even if they groan, they're probably smiling on the inside)

Too Busy Playing To Eat Lunch



For many active children, it can be too exciting to eat lunch at school. All they want to do is get out and play. Some schools schedule time for play before lunchtime, so children can burn off their excitement and sit still to eat lunch. If your child's school doesn't have this program, talk to them about it. A toolkit for schools to help implement the "Play First Lunch" can be found at the following link:

<https://peacefulplaygrounds.com/download/lunch/play-first-lunch-toolkit.pdf>

In the meantime, if your child can't seem to get their lunch in, then provide a healthy (and a bit heartier) afternoon snack. Sometimes, a child can have a snack for lunch, and lunch for the afternoon snack.

Peer Pressure & Skipping Lunch

More and more often teenagers and even pre-teens are skipping lunch. This is a hard time of life for pre-teens and teenagers and trying to fit in with their peer group is important. It's good to have frank conversations with your children about whether or not they are eating lunch, and if not, why. Some children and youth try to diet and others just don't want to stand out in their peer group. Try to arm your children with facts about the benefits of eating lunch, such as:

- Eating regularly (not skipping) helps with maintaining a healthy weight
- Hunger control. Skipping meals causes increased hunger later, and a high likelihood of overeating
- If your child is actively trying to avoid meals to lose weight, it may help to explain that teenagers who try to diet often end up gaining more weight than their non-dieting peers

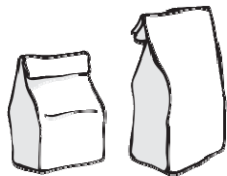
Keep a watchful eye on dieting preteens and teenagers. If their dieting seems to intensify, it is a good idea to discuss this with your family doctor.

Keep Lunch Safe

Many lunch foods can spoil and should not be out of a fridge for longer than 2 hours. To keep food cold, put a freezer pack in with the lunch and keep drinks like milk in a thermos. To keep foods hot, use an insulated thermos.

Lunch Ideas

(Remember, teenagers will generally need a larger lunch, and young children will need a smaller lunch)



PACK A GRAIN AND PROTEIN FOOD

- Sandwiches:
 - Meat and cheese with margarine and mustard
 - Tuna or salmon salad
 - Peanut butter and jam
 - Cucumber and cream cheese
- Whole grain** crackers and cheese, crackers with tuna, crackers and soup
- Granola with yogurt
- Burritos with beans and cheese or a tortilla with baked beans
- Homemade muffin with cheese or peanut butter or cottage cheese
- Leftovers: pasta and tomato sauce, rice with meat and vegetables, cold pizza

ADD A VEGETABLE AND/OR FRUIT

- Carrot sticks, celery sticks, broccoli (etc.) with a dip (ranch or hummus)
- Apple pieces (dipped in lemon juice to prevent browning), oranges, berries, cantaloupe and melon (cut up), banana

ADD A MILK OR MILK ALTERNATIVE

- Yogurt, cheese strings (if not already provided in a sandwich or main course), milk, kefir

ADD A SMALL TREAT

- Animal crackers with yogurt to dip
- Cookies

**For whole grain cereal, breads and granola bars: >2g fibre/serving = good; >5g fibre/serving = great!