Healthier Packed Lunches for Children

What you need to know

Eating well is important. Children need to eat well as it will give them energy and nutrients to grow and develop, be healthy and active.

A healthy, enjoyable lunch gives children the energy they need to learn and play at school.





Use the information in this leaflet to help make your child a healthier packed lunch. The information in this leaflet follows the government's packed lunch guidelines.

What is a healthy packed lunch?

Starchy Foods

Base each meal on a starchy food, such as bread, potato, rice pasta, yam. Starchy foods give energy, fibre, vitamins and minerals.





- Bread, try different types, such as sliced bread pitta brad, chapattis, bread rolls, wraps or crackers.
- Other starchy foods, such as pasta, couscous, rice or noodles.
- Whole grain varieties are best for fibre, which is vital for a healthy digestive system

Meat and Alternatives

Add some protein, for example meat, fish, eggs, beans or pulses. Protein foods build muscles and provide minerals.





- Lean meats, such as chicken.
- Egg, such as boiled, quiche or omelette.
- Meat alternatives, such as quorn or tofu.
- Dishes containing pulses, beans or meat, for example curry, houmous or bean salad.

- Meat products such as sausage rolls, sausages and chipolatas, pies and pastries, fried foods should not be included more than once a fortnight.
- Use butter, margarine, mayonnaise or salad dressings sparingly, because these can be high in fat, or use lower fat alternatives.
- The school has a no peanuts or nuts policy as some children are allergic to these.

Drinks

Drinks, especially water, help children to concentrate and feel well. Water is freely available in school.

Other healthy drinks such as milk, pure 100% juice, sparkling water, fruit smoothie or yoghurt or milk drink can also be included.



Snacks and Confectionery

Snack foods may be included occasionally but aim to make healthier choices. Snack foods tend to be high in fat, sugar and salt. Foods high in fat can cause excessive weight and may lead to heart disease. High sugar foods are high in calories and bad for teeth. High salt foods may increase blood pressure, this can lead to heart disease and some cancers.



A healthy packed lunch is a balanced meal providing a variety of nutrients, to be found in four food groups.

Milk and Dairy Foods

Include a dairy product or dairy alternative, such as cheese, yoghurt or fromage frais. These foods provide calcium necessary for strong bones and teeth, as well as providing protein and vitamins.

✔ Lower fat varieties are healthier.



Fruit and Vegetables

Don't forget to include fruit and vegetables. You can use fresh, frozen, tinned or dried. Fruit and vegetables are full of vitamins, minerals and fibre necessary for the body to function properly and to keep you strong and healthy.



- Add tomato, lettuce, cucumber or grated carrot to a sandwich.
- A vegetable dish, such as salad or roast vegetables.
- Fresh fruit, such as apple, banana, melon pieces or Satsuma's.
- Dried fruit, such as raisins or apricots.
- Fruit salad (fresh or tinned in juice) or vegetable salad.
- Finger foods, such as cherry tomatoes, grapes or carrot. Good with a dip. Such as houmous or salsa.



✔ Use fresh fruit and vegetables, which are in season to help the environment and and enjoy variety.

✔ All packed lunches should contain at least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables or salad.

✔ A Piece of fruit can be bought from school for 10p

For a healthier snack:

✔ Replace sweets and chocolate with plain biscuits, dried fruit, a small bunch of grapes or fruit salad

✔ Replace cakes and pastries with fruit bread, crumpets, teacake or malt loaf.

✔ Replace salted savoury snacks with rice cakes, breadsticks, plain popcorn or cheese and crackers

✘ Packed lunches should not contain chocolate, items containing chocolate, sweets, salted savoury snacks or crisp-like products

Practical Tips for a Healthy Lunchbox

Try to vary the contents of the lunchbox daily. That way you can ensure your child is getting the variety of nutrients their bodies need to function and grow.

Involve your child in preparing their lunchbox. They are more likely to enjoy food they have made themselves.

Wash your hands before handling food. Wash fruit and vegetables before use and put food in clean containers.

To keep food fresh, make sure it is stored properly: lunches packed the night before need to be stored in the fridge. If using rice, make sure it is cooled quickly and stored in the fridge overnight. To keep your lunch fresh during the day, use a cool bag and put in a frozen drink or reusable ice pack.

Keep different breads in the freezer so you can just take out and defrost what you need for one day's lunchbox. Using different breads will make the lunchbox more interesting and enjoyable.

If your child refuses to eat brown bread, try a lighter variety or make sandwiches using a slice of white and a slice of wholemeal bread.
For variety, use pitta strips, crackers, bread sticks, or fruit and vegetable finger foods with a dip.

Always try to add a little salad to each sandwich. To avoid soggy sandwiches, dry the salad before adding it to the sandwich or put in a separate sandwich bag or tub.

Make a fruit smoothies by blending juice and fruit together, or a yoghurt or milk drink by mixing yogurt or semi-skimmed milk with pureed fruit.

Make a lower-fat salad dressing by mixing it with some low-fat yogurt or semi-skimmed milk.

You can use leftovers; for example pasta and sauce.

Make a salad using rice, potato or pasta from the night before, mixed with vegetables, beans etc

For more information, resources and advice go to:

www.eatwell.gov.uk
www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/packedlunches
www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/flash/a_healthy_lunchbox_intro.swf
www.pan-wm.org.uk/resources/healthypackedlunch/64347_Lunchpack.pdf