



Healthy Lunch and Snack Ideas



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Studies show that well-nourished children can concentrate longer and perform better at school. Include healthy foods and drinks in school lunches to make sure children are ready to learn.

Tips for packing a healthy and safe school lunch:

- Plan ahead;
- Get the children involved;
- Use leftovers to save time;
- Use a thermos to help keep hot foods hot. Warm the thermos with boiling water before filling it with hot food;
- Use an insulated lunch bag and a freezer pack to keep cold foods cold;
- Wash fresh vegetables and fruits;
- Not all food that comes home in the lunch bag can be reused. Leftover sandwiches, hot foods, milk, yogurt and cheese are not safe to eat another day so don't repack those foods. Also do not reuse wrappings;
- Wash reusable beverage and food containers with soap and hot water;
- Teach children to wash their hands before eating.



Allergy Alert! Some healthy food and beverage choices are not permitted at school due to allergy awareness. Several schools are peanut aware or have policies around other foods so check with your school about these foods and avoid packing them for lunch and snacks.

Use Canada's Food Guide to pack tasty, healthy choices for growing bodies

For a well-balanced lunch, include foods from all groupings of the Canada's Food Guide



Vegetables and fruits

Vegetables and fruits are important for growth and development. They provide a variety of vitamins, minerals and fibre, and contribute to overall well-being. To help children get enough vegetables and fruits, include them with every meal and snack.

Whole grain foods

Make sure you include whole grain foods, which are key to getting enough fibre and vitamins. You can use whole grain breads, rolls or wraps for sandwiches and whole grain crackers or cereal for grab-and-go choices.

Protein foods

Choose plant-based protein foods like hummus or beans, which are healthy, full of fibre and can be more affordable. Hard-boiled eggs, cheese and left over lean meat, chicken or turkey are also great options for packed lunches.

Healthy lunch ideas

- Thermos of chili with a whole grain roll and an orange;
- Mini pizza (made with a whole grain English muffin, sauce, veggies such as tomatoes and peppers and topped with cheese) and canned peaches;
- Homemade chicken and vegetable soup, whole grain crackers and an apple;
- Turkey sandwich on whole grain bread with lettuce and tomato, yogurt and frozen blueberries.





Make water the drink of choice and send it to school in a reusable bottle. Other healthy drink options include white milk or unsweetened fortified plant-based beverages such as soy or almond beverage.

Limit sugary drinks such as soft drinks, fruit-flavored drinks, 100% fruit juice, flavoured waters with added sugars, vitamin waters, sport and energy drinks, hot chocolate, iced tea and other sweetened hot or cold beverages. Children also do not need food or drinks with artificial sweeteners.

Make your own “lunch kits”

Kids often want packaged foods they see on TV, online, or in their friends’ lunches. Be aware of foods marketed to kids and ongoing new products on the shelf. Store bought lunch kits can be high in sodium (salt), sugars and/or saturated fat and are usually low in fibre and other nutrients.

Try a reusable container with sections to make your own lunch kits. Kids like finger foods, so cut sandwiches, wraps or other foods into smaller pieces. Add raw veggies or fruits to complete the kit.

Don’t forget snacks!

To get the variety of nutrients children need for growth and development, as well as for lifelong healthy bodies, include at least one healthy snack each day in your child’s lunch bag.

Healthy snack ideas

- Apple slices and cheese;
- Yogurt and canned fruit;
- Carrot and turnip strips with hummus for dip;
- Fruit salad made with fresh, frozen or canned fruits;
- Whole grain cereal with white milk and fresh or frozen berries;
- Homemade muffin and a banana;
- Hard-boiled egg and an orange.

Limit the amount of highly processed foods you offer for lunches and snacks. Examples of processed foods include:

- sugary drinks;
- chocolate and candies;
- ice cream and frozen desserts;
- fast foods like French fries and burgers;
- frozen packaged meals like pasta dishes and pizzas;
- bakery products like muffins, buns and cakes;
- processed meats like sausages, bologna, wieners, and deli meats;
- fruit leathers and other types of fruit snacks with added sugar;
- chips and cheesies.

These foods can be high in sodium (salt), sugars and/or saturated fat. If you choose to include these highly processed foods, do so less often and send small amounts. It is what a child eats over time that matters most, not what they eat occasionally. Try to pack healthy choices most often.

Label reading: Use the Nutrition Facts Table on store-bought products to help you choose the healthiest options. Using the percent Daily Value (% DV) can help you choose products that are lower in sodium, sugars and saturated fats. Anything with 5% DV or less is considered "a little" of that particular nutrient, while anything with 15% DV or more is considered "a lot".

Check the list of ingredients as well; a food contains more of the ingredients found at the beginning of the list, and less of the ingredients at the end of the list.

Did you know? Children usually have about 20 minutes to eat lunch at school. For younger children, save time by peeling fruit when possible and cut up foods into smaller pieces, before packing in their lunch bags.



Healthy Eating for Everyone



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