

Super Sack Lunches

Lunch packed at home is worth the little extra effort and time it takes to make. Home-packed lunch means fresh, tasty foods made just the way you or your child like. They are far superior in nutrition and cost much less than pre-packaged lunches. And they can be personalized to include treats to make them even more special.

Step 1: Plan It

- ◆ Keep likes and dislikes in mind when deciding what to include. It makes no sense to send something that won't be eaten.
- ◆ Occasionally put in a new food to try. It may become a favorite!
- ◆ Nutritious foods provide the best fuel for growing youngsters as well as adults. Choose whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean meats and low-fat dairy products. Limit sweets and foods high in salt. See the suggestions below for good food ideas.
- ◆ Involve children in deciding what to pack by giving them specific choices. For example, would they prefer cheddar or brick cheese, an apple or an orange?
- ◆ Keep lunch safe to eat by keeping it piping hot or icy cold.
 - Vacuum bottles keep food hot if pre-heated with boiling water just before filling with hot food.
 - Keep food cold with an ice pack or by freezing sandwiches, cartons of yogurt or juice boxes before packing in an insulated lunch bag. Or, send only nonperishable foods like peanut butter or hard cheeses, raw vegetables and fruits.

Step 2: Make It

- ◆ Set aside time on the weekend to pre-package small snack bags of cut up vegetables like cherry tomatoes, baby carrots, pepper strips, broccoli trees, and so on.
- ◆ Other items to pre-package are trail or snack mix, crackers, baked chips, pretzels and cereal.
- ◆ Make and freeze meat sandwiches up to two weeks in advance. Remember to label them.
- ◆ Complete lunch preparation the night before to ease time crunch in the morning. Have the kids help or take over this job if old enough.

Step 3: Take It

- ◆ Finish packing perishable items in the morning. An insulated bag will help everything stay cold and safe until lunch time if a cold pack or frozen item is included.
- ◆ Include paper napkins, plastic spoons or other utensils to make it easy to eat neatly. An occasional note or cartoon will be a pleasant reminder of home. Hand wipes remind that hands should be washed before lunch.
- ◆ Sticky notes on the front door, backpack or bathroom mirror serve as reminders so lunch is not left behind in the rush to get out the door.

Food Suggestions

Sandwiches and More

- ◆ Use whole grain breads and crackers—100% whole wheat bread, whole wheat tortillas and pita bread, multi-grain crackers.

- ◆ Make homemade Lunchables by cutting meat and cheese into small squares and sending with crackers.
- ◆ Make wraps with whole wheat tortillas spread with peanut butter and jelly or deli meats, a thin layer of mayo and lettuce.
- ◆ Cut leftover cooked chicken into strips and pack with dippers like barbecue sauce, honey mustard or low fat ranch dressing.
- ◆ Make sandwiches with leftover waffles and pancakes. Peanut butter and jelly is especially good.
- ◆ Leftover cooked hamburgers, meat loaf, roast beef or pork also make excellent sandwiches. Younger children may have trouble chewing roast beef and pork.
- ◆ Send cheese slices or cubes or string cheese with grapes, apples or other fruit. Dip light colored fruit like apple slices in orange juice or brush lightly with lemon juice to prevent browning.
- ◆ Peel and bag whole hard cooked eggs for younger children.

Satisfying Sides

- ◆ Send a small container of low fat ranch dressing as a dip with raw vegetables. Go beyond carrots and celery sticks to cauliflower, broccoli, sugar snap peas, jicama, zucchini.
- ◆ Bag up dried fruit with nuts or seeds and maybe some cereal O's or squares.
- ◆ Cole slaw, potato salad and pasta salad are good for lunch. Remember the fork.
- ◆ Buy or make individual pudding or fruit cups.
- ◆ Wrap washed and dried lettuce or spinach leaves in a paper towel to add to sandwiches at lunchtime.
- ◆ Whole fresh fruit like apples and oranges are easy for older children and adults to handle. Younger children may need oranges peeled and sectioned in a baggy, apples cored and sliced (see note above about preventing browning).
- ◆ An occasional sweet treat of cookies or cupcake is fine, especially if they are made with more nutritious ingredients like oatmeal cookies, fig bars or carrot cake.

Thirst Quenchers

- ◆ Milk is the ideal beverage as it supplies important calcium to build and maintain healthy bones for kids and adults. Fat free skim milk is the best choice, but even flavored milks are good choices.
- ◆ Fruit juices labeled as 100% fruit juice are good choices for an occasional change. They are more nutritious than fruit drinks or punches, but still fairly high in sugar.
- ◆ Sports drinks and other fruit-flavored drinks or soft drinks are high in sugar (about 9 teaspoons in 12 ounces) and could be saved for an occasional treat at home.