

Lunches to Go

Lunch is an important part of your child's day. How can you pack something healthy, portable, food safe *and* liked by your child? Here are some simple tips and ideas to get you started.

Lunchbox Tips

- Keep foods simple and easy to eat.
- Include foods from each of the food groups: Vegetables and Fruit, Grain Products, Milk and Alternatives, and Meat and Alternatives.
- Let your child help choose the foods that go into their lunch. They can choose between foods from the same food group. For example, "Would you like an apple or a banana? Would you prefer yogurt or a cheese string?" They can also help prepare and pack their lunch.
- Sending the same food items often (even daily) is okay as long as they're healthy.
- Leftovers make great lunches. They can be sent cold or hot, in a thermos. You can also cook a large batch of something (e.g. macaroni and cheese or chili) and freeze it until needed.
- Send fruit instead of juice.
- Water, chilled milk or fortified soy beverage are all good choices to send for lunches and snacks.
- Choose foods that don't list sugar in the ingredient list. Other names for sugar include glucose-fructose, sucrose, corn syrup, and evaporated cane juice.

Healthy Lunch Ideas

Finger foods

- Hummus or other bean dip with cut-up veggies and pita triangles
- Apple slices and seed butter (e.g. sunflower seed butter)
- Strips of French toast with yogurt or fruit puree
- Veggie sticks and yogurt-based dip

- Whole grain pita or tortilla chips with fresh tomato salsa and guacamole
- Roasted chickpeas or shelled edamame
- Trail mix with any of the following: whole grain cereal, air-popped popcorn, nuts (where allowed), seeds, dried fruit, and coconut
- Whole grain crackers with cheese cubes or a hard-boiled egg

Sandwiches

- Falafel, plain or flavoured hummus
- Egg salad
- Diced chicken chunks and chopped seedless grapes
- Marinated tofu slices and veggies
- Canned or cooked fish
- Black beans, corn, peppers and tomato*

Add any of the following veggies: tomato, cucumber or onion slices; grated or shredded carrot, cabbage, or lettuce; roasted veggies.

Add extra moisture to sandwich fillings by using any of the following, depending on your child's taste: mayonnaise, cream cheese, non-hydrogenated margarine, or plain or flavoured mustard.

As a change from bread, try tortilla, flat bread, pita, rice cakes, crackers, melba toast, bread sticks, chapatti, roti or bannock. Choose whole grain when possible.

*Best tried in a tortilla or pita.

Instead of sandwiches - hot food ideas

- Stews, soups or chowders
- Casseroles, curries or chili
- Macaroni and cheese
- Perogies or pot stickers
- Meatballs with spaghetti or rice
- Whole wheat steamed Asian bun
- Oatmeal made with milk, cooked apples and cinnamon

Instead of sandwiches – cold food ideas

- Homemade burrito or quesadilla with salsa
- Whole grain pancakes or waffles with fruit and yogurt
- Whole grain cereal with milk and fruit
- Vietnamese salad rolls
- Homemade baked samosa
- Build your own pizza with an English muffin or pita, tomato sauce or pesto, sliced vegetables and grated cheese
- Homemade muffin with ricotta cheese and fruit
- Bulgur, quinoa or barley salad (e.g. tabbouleh) with cubes of chicken or tofu and diced peppers, tomatoes, and other veggies
- Vegetable nori rolls with rice, cucumber, carrot, sweet bell pepper, avocado, and tofu strips

Vegetables and fruits

- Fruit or veggie kebabs
- Veggie stir fry
- Fruit and yogurt smoothie (chilled in a thermos)
- Yogurt parfait: Layer plain yogurt, fruit and granola or other cereal
- Ants on a log: fill celery with guacamole, cream cheese, pumpkin seed butter, or hummus. Top with corn, chickpeas, raisins or pumpkin seeds.
- Dried fruit
- Greek salad
- Strawberries or other fruit pieces dipped in yogurt or homemade pudding
- Homemade fruit or tomato salsa and tortilla chips
- Banana roll-ups: spread seed butter on one side of a small tortilla. Place banana on top and roll up.
- Fruit salad
- Veggies and dip (yogurt-based dip, hummus or some other spread)

How to Pack a Safe Lunch

- Always use clean kitchen tools to make lunches.
- If you make lunch the night before it's eaten, keep it in the refrigerator until your child goes to school.
- Use an insulated bag with a freezer pack or a chilled thermos to keep food and drinks cool.
- Use a thermos to keep hot food hot. Pre-heat the thermos with hot water before filling.
- Wash all fresh fruit and vegetables, even if the package says "pre-washed."
- Wash lunch containers every night and clean them with baking soda once a week to get rid of odours.
- Perishable food that returns home at the end of the day should be thrown out.
- Do not reuse plastic bags. They can hold bacteria.
- If you send liquids in reusable bottles, use a bottle brush to clean bottles after each use.

Be Allergy Aware

Some schools have rules about the types of foods that can be brought to the classroom. For more information about food allergy and how to be allergy aware, speak with school staff or call 8-1-1 to speak with a registered dietitian.

Add a Little Extra

Sometimes adding something extra to the lunch bag can help your child be excited about their lunch. Some ideas include the following:

- Sticker, picture
- Funny joke, poem or other note
- Fun lunch containers or lunch bag

Last Updated: April 2017

©2017 Province of British Columbia. All rights reserved. May be reproduced in its entirety provided the source is acknowledged. This information is not meant to replace advice from your medical doctor or individual counselling with a health professional. It is intended for educational and informational purposes only.