

easy ways to make lunchboxes healthier



School dinners are changing for the better. You should have noticed a difference in what's on offer, with healthier foods being served.

If your children prefer packed lunches here are some tips to help make their packed lunch healthier too. You can make up the lunch in the morning before school. Or, if you're usually pushed for time in the morning, prepare it the night before and put it in the fridge.

me sized meals

Even though they are growing children need to eat the right amount for their age. Young children will need quite small portions of foods and older children who are very active may need much larger amounts.

a healthy lunchbox contains a variety of foods

Start with starchy foods - always include foods like bread, rolls, bagels, wraps, rice, pasta or potato.

Start their packed lunch off with some starchy carbohydrate to give long-lasting energy. Use more wholegrain, brown or seeded bread as these are high in fibre. For a change from ordinary bread you could try pittas, bagels, baguettes, ciabatta, bread rolls or wraps.

Wholegrain or plain pasta or couscous can be mixed with meat, fish and vegetables and eaten cold.

and then Protein

Add a portion of food rich in protein, such as chicken, lean meat, fish, egg, or a meat alternative such as quorn either on its own or as a sandwich filler.

add a couple of portions of fruit and vegetables

Try to add a portion of fruit and a portion of vegetables to help towards their 5-a-day

need something extra?

Add a healthy snack like a low fat and sugar yoghurt, currant bun or rice pudding. Unsalted nuts are good to have at home but it is best to leave them out of your child's lunch box.

thirsty?

Remember always include a drink. Water, milk, pure unsweetened fruit juice/fruit smoothies (maximum of 150ml per day) are good choices. Fruit juices and smoothies are best drunk at mealtimes to avoid tooth decay. It is important your child has plenty of water to drink, this should be freely available in school.

five a day



As well as fresh fruit such as apples and bananas you can add variety by including a handful of grapes, chopped fresh fruit salad, orange segments or melon pieces, or a small box of raisins or tinned fruit in natural fruit juice.

- Don't forget to include some vegetables, such as cherry tomatoes, or sticks of carrot, cucumber, broccoli, celery and peppers.
- Once a week, why not go for a colourful mixed salad and a bread roll.

keep it cool! - avoid food poisoning

Lunchboxes should be kept cool - ideally use an insulated lunchbox with icepacks or a frozen carton of juice to keep it cool. If sandwiches are prepared the previous evening, always store them in a fridge overnight. And don't forget to keep the packed lunch cool at school.

here are a few lunch ideas to try, or you could make up your own combinations

Suggestions for a weeks packed lunch menus:



day one

Multigrain bread or rolls
Cheddar cheese with apple slices
or cranberry sauce or chopped
hard boiled eggs with cucumber or
lettuce

Banana
Flapjack
Pure fruit juice - orange



day two

Cooked pasta or couscous mixed
with cooked chicken or turkey,
tomatoes, and lettuce

Pear
A pot of fruit yoghurt
Sparkling water

day three

Multigrain bread or crackers
Light low fat cheese spread and
dried apricots or cucumber

Tangerine /satsuma
Malt loaf or scotch pancakes
Pure fruit juice - apple

day four

Pitta pockets or wraps with ham
with sliced tomatoes, lettuce and
cucumber
Apple

Bara Brith
Yoghurt drink
Plain water



day five

Ciabatta bread or bagels
Tuna, cucumber, green pepper,
sweetcorn and tomato
Pot of mixed sliced fruit

- melon and pineapple cubes
with grapes
Rice pudding pot
Fruit smoothie

top tips for a healthier lunchbox

Pack foods attractively; cut foods into shapes; use a variety of containers. This is an opportunity to re-cycle packaging e.g. use clean, empty containers

- Involve your child in planning his/her lunchbox. Encourage him/her to try new foods. Variety is the key to a healthier lunchbox. Give praise, reward stickers etc, if they eat new foods.
- You could also raid the fridge for leftovers. Some foods taste just as good cold, such as pizza or pasta. Cook extra pasta or couscous. Mix with cut-up vegetables, and protein such as tuna, then just add your favourite dressing.
- Make sandwiches with thickly sliced bread, or choose rolls or mini pitta breads. Go for wholegrain or wholemeal varieties when you can.

Many children are taking food to school that contains too much saturated fat, salt and sugar. To help parents give their children varied and balanced lunchboxes, here are some practical tips and suggestions.

tips for cutting down on fat

Cut down on the amount of butter, margarine or mayonnaise you use and use lower fat alternatives.

- Use low-fat sandwich fillings, such as chicken, lean meats, ham, beef, fish (e.g. tuna), boiled egg.

tips for reducing sugar

Rather than drinks that are very high in sugar, such as fizzy drinks or 'juice drinks', go for water, milk or pure unsweetened fruit juice/fruit smoothies (not more than 150ml/day).

- Replace cakes, chocolates and biscuits with scones, currant buns, fruit bread, fruit, pot of rice pudding or yoghurt.



tips for reducing salt

Try not to add salt to food that you prepare and check out food labels for foods lower in salt.

tips for shopping trips

Reading supermarket food labels can help you to buy healthier foods for your child's lunch. Choose more 'greens' and 'ambers' and fewer 'reds' when filling up your shopping basket.