

Back to School – Avoiding Lunch-Time Dilemmas

Parents are faced with the “what to pack for lunch” dilemma everyday! Although lunch options are improving in many schools, let’s face it, some kids just won’t eat school lunches. So, what’s a busy mom or dad to do?!

Plan Ahead

Invest in a sectioned container so you can be sure to give your child all food groups — grain, fruit, vegetable, and protein. Try one of these easy-to-pack lunches, and your child can enjoy a healthy meal at school.

- Two slices of turkey, one slice of low-fat cheese, two slices of whole wheat bread, some broccoli florets, and sliced apples. Low-fat milk or yogurt is a great way to add additional protein and calcium without adding too many calories.
- Two no-bake, mini-pizzas made with whole grain English muffins, low-sodium pizza sauce, low-fat cheese, and topped with colorful and sweet bell peppers. Enjoy with six ounces of 100% fruit juice.

Pack Your Own “Hot Lunch”

A small thermos can be a great way to provide a healthy hot meal, even at lunchtime.

- A homemade veggie and chicken fried rice can be an excellent way to get most of the food groups in one meal — sauté the vegetables of your choice with small cubes of chicken and add precooked brown rice with some seasonings. Don’t forget to send a fruit on the side!
- A chili or stew made with lean protein along with whole grain crackers. Fruit can satisfy that “sweet tooth” without added sugar!

Complete Their Meal

Sometimes, kids will eat the school’s lunch entrée but don’t like the veggie or fruit “side” options. Don’t forget that organic is a great choice if you eat the peel, and here are some suggestions to help you complete their meal:

- carrot or celery sticks with low-fat dressing
- strawberries
- cherry tomatoes
- sweet bell peppers (red, yellow, orange)
- broccoli or cauliflower florets
- sliced apples
- easy-to-peel and seedless clementine
- small banana

Many healthy lunch ideas — created by kids for kids — are available in the *Healthy Lunchtime Challenge Cookbook*. Check out a link to the PDF below.

Following some of these tips can make lunch-time dilemmas virtually non-existent. The key is to plan ahead whenever possible and offer variety. Remember, good nutrition isn’t really hard to find — you just need to know where to look.

So look for the following Keys to Better Health™ icons during your school-time grocery shopping trips:

- Whole Grain
- Organic
- Smart Sugar
- Heart Healthy
- 100% Juice
- Low Sodium

Make it a great school year!



REFERENCES

1. Healthy Lunchtime Challenge Cookbook. <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/healthy-eating-tips/sample-menus-recipes/HealthyLunchtimeChallengeCookbook.pdf>

