

PACKING HEALTHY SCHOOL LUNCHES



LET'S GET STARTED!

FRUITS

Berries, apples, grapes, raisins, kiwi, oranges, apple sauce, peaches, pears, pineapple

VEGETABLES

Broccoli, bell peppers, tomatoes, celery, baby carrots, cucumber, snap peas, avocado, sweet potato chips, salad

GRAINS

Whole grain crackers, chips, pasta, bagels, wraps, pita bread, pretzels, granola

PROTEIN/DAIRY

Tuna, chicken, hard boiled eggs, egg bites, hummus, sliced meats, nuts, peanut butter, cottage cheese, yogurt, cheese

1. Include All the Food Groups

A healthy meal is all about having a balanced meal. Don't limit yourself by only enjoying food in one way. Fruits and vegetables can be enjoyed fresh, frozen, canned, dried, or even baked (apple or sweet potato chips). Use vegetables to make a yummy dip like guacamole. When it comes to grains choose whole grains. Change it up by using grains you don't typically use like pita breads, whole grain muffins, or granola that can be added to yogurt. Proteins and dairy have so many options and are helpful in keeping you fuller longer. Try cooking meats in different ways like grilled, shredded, or canned. Boiled eggs are easy and can be eaten alone, on a salad, or made into deviled eggs. Cooking egg bites in a muffin tin can be a quick breakfast or easy way to add protein to your lunch. Cottage cheese, milk, and cheese are all quick and simple dairy ideas. Check out the column on the left for more ways to get build balanced meals.

2. Plan, Prep, & Pack on the Weekends

Preparing meals individually during the week can lead to more work. Most things can be cut, cooked, and packed on the weekend and still be good all week long. Keep your dinners in mind too. You can combine prep for dinners with lunches, like cooking enough chicken in one batch for both. You can also plan to use leftovers for lunch. This can cut back on the amount of lunches you need to prep for. Washing, cutting, and cooking everything you want for your kids lunches on the weekend can save you time and won't cut into your busy week!



3. Get Your Kids Involved

Kids are more likely to eat the foods served to them if they are involved with planning and making the meals. There are plenty of age appropriate tasks kids can do to help you plan, prep, and pack their meals. Allow your children to choose from a list of foods. Ask them to choose one food from each food group to make a meal or have a list of foods you can make like pasta salad, tuna salad, yogurt parfaits, etc. You are providing them options but guiding their options to make sure they have a balanced meal. Allowing your children to wash, cut, or pack the foods will help them build their fine motor skills and teach them how they can do this for themselves when they are older. Go shopping with your child to pick out some lunch containers. They can be fun with different prints or have separate compartments for kids that don't like food to touch. Consider using silicone muffin liners to help separate different foods.

4. Make Healthy Foods Fun

Healthy foods don't have to be boring. Use hummus, salsa, or a Greek yogurt as dips for fruits and vegetables. Add fruit, nuts, and granola to yogurt for a parfait. Make ants on a log with celery, peanut butter, and raisins. Cut the meat and cheese into fun shapes with cookie cutters. Use holidays and special dates to liven up your lunch plans. Heart shaped cheese for Valentines Day or green foods for St. Patrick's Day.

"Research shows that eating habits and healthy behaviors are connected to academic achievement."

-CDC

WHY ARE HEALTHY LUNCHES SO IMPORTANT?

Children expend a lot of energy learning & playing at school. They need food that can provide their bodies with the fuel and nutrients needed to perform at their best. Research shows that inadequate consumption of fruits, vegetables, and dairy as well as deficits in specific nutrients is associated with lower grades among students. Following the tips above can help provide your child with the fuel and nutrients needed to succeed in school.