

Packing a healthy lunch

Kids who eat a healthy lunch do better in school. Lunch does not need to be boring or unhealthy. You can make healthy choices without getting burnt out on sandwiches! It is okay to pick and choose from foods that do not seem to go together. Just be sure to provide a variety of foods from each of the different food groups.

What should I pack?

The best lunch is one with foods from various food groups. Kids who help choose and make meals tend to eat better. To help make healthier choices, here are some guidelines:

- Aim for at least three different food groups: protein, dairy, grains, fruits and vegetables.
- Include several healthy food choices. Fruits and vegetables are a great place to start!
- Offer water, skim or 1% milk, or unsweetened drinks.

How can I make sandwiches fun?

- Sandwich bread is not the only option: English muffins, mini bagels, whole wheat tortillas, whole wheat pitas, whole wheat crackers, rice cakes, whole grain waffles, rolls, or buns make great sandwiches too.
- When choosing bread alternatives, aim for whole grain options.
- Besides peanut butter, there are a lot of foods with protein that you can put on a sandwich. Try chicken, tuna, eggs, cheese, beans, lean ham, cottage cheese, or leftover meats from dinner.
- For younger kids, cut bread into varied shapes. Use cookie cutters to make fun shapes.
- Don't forget to load the sandwich with vegetables!

What can I send for lunch besides sandwiches?

- Send leftovers, such as pizza slices, pasta salad, casseroles, or spaghetti. Your child can try them hot or cold.
- Make and send salad in a bag. Put lettuce, your favorite vegetables, chunks of cheese, hard boiled eggs, or leftover cooked chicken breast in a plastic bag. Put a small amount of dressing in a container on the side.
- Ants on a log. Spread a little bit of peanut butter on a celery stick. Top it with raisins or other diced dried fruit.
- Spell words and make smiley faces with cut-up vegetables, pretzel sticks, or cereal.
- Dipping is fun! Try dressing or dips, hummus, bean spread, guacamole, peanut butter, almond butter or sunflower seed butter for vegetables, fruits, and pretzels.



Great lunches for school:

- Whole wheat bread with peanut butter and banana sandwich; vanilla yogurt; cucumber slices; fresh orange; milk.
- Whole wheat bagel with a thin layer of cream cheese and tomato; baby carrots and hummus; fresh strawberries; milk.
- Baked chicken strips; baked tortilla chips with salsa; red pepper strips; fresh grapes; water.
- Cold cut roll-up – turkey and a slice of cheese rolled in a tortilla; assorted fresh veggies; melon chunks; milk.
- Turkey breast, sprouts, honey mustard on a whole wheat roll; cottage cheese; raisins; apple; water.
- Diced chicken, tomatoes and lettuce in pita bread; yogurt; fresh pineapple chunks; water.
- Pita pocket filled with fresh veggies; string cheese; a hardboiled egg; orange; milk.

Food safety tips

Handle food safely when you pack a school lunch.

- Remind children to wash their hands before eating.
- Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.
- Keep hot foods in a thermos away from cold foods.
- Use an insulated lunch box with an icepack. Make sure to wash the insulated lunch box after each use.
- You can also try freezing a bottle of water. It will thaw by lunchtime, but it will help keep the other foods cold.
- Teach your kids to keep their lunch bags out of the direct sun.

ALERT: Call your child’s doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.