

Nourishing Notes

Healthy Lunches for Kids

School-age children need balanced lunches that are appealing and satisfying to energize them for the day.

Lunch provides a major part of your child's daily food intake and is especially important if your child is involved in after-school sports or activities. Pack an energy-filled lunch to provide enough fuel for the day.

Planning nutritious lunches that are tasty, creative, and packed safely may be tricky. Here are a few simple tips to help you face the challenge.

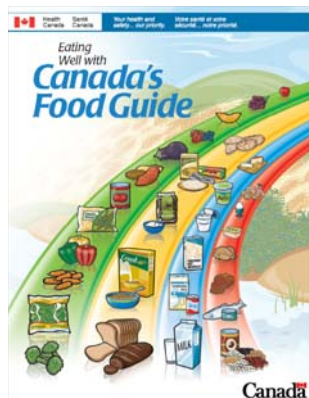
Provide a lunch that includes a variety of nutritious foods. Aim to include foods from at least three of the four food groups from *Canada's Food Guide*:

Vegetables and Fruit

Grain Products

Milk and Alternatives

Meat and Alternatives



Go for It With Grains

Kick the habit of the same old sandwich and try something new. Experiment with different grains to spark some interest. Vary the type of bread you use when making sandwiches; choose from marble rye, pumpernickel, or whole grain to name a few. Let your child help by making the choice.

Be different:

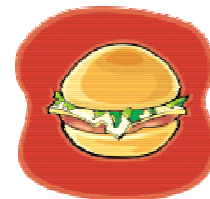
- Cut bagels into bite-sized pieces for more kid-friendly nibbles.
- Start a sandwich with a crusty or panini roll; cut in half to make more manageable.
- Pack a whole wheat pita with an interesting filling (see below).
- Use mini pitas to make bite-sized sandwiches.
- Wrap up a filling with a soft tortilla for a different twist.

Power Up With Protein

Milk and Alternatives and *Meat and Alternatives* groups include protein choices that add staying power. Great tasting, lower-fat sandwich fillings include turkey, chicken, roast beef, ham, and tuna or salmon (canned in water). Leaner varieties of salami and bologna are also available. Small amounts of shredded cheese sprinkled on a sandwich make a great flavour-booster. Go easy on the butter, margarine, and mayonnaise. Try flavoured mustards for a new taste.

Other tasty fillings:

- Peanut butter with sliced banana
- Sliced chicken with cranberry sauce
- Thinly sliced cheese with cucumber slices
- Egg salad with grated carrot and diced celery
- Tuna or chicken mixed with diced apple, raisins, and low-fat mayonnaise
- Meatloaf with ketchup
- Hummus (chickpea spread) and vegetables



Beyond Sandwiches

Sandwiches aren't the only way to make interesting lunches. Pair up grain and protein finger foods to create your own "lunch-able". Pack foods in small reusable plastic containers to be more environmentally friendly.

Grains

- Bread sticks
- Dry whole grain cereal
- Leftover pasta or rice
- Melba toast
- Homemade oatmeal muffin or banana bread
- Pita bread wedges
- Rice cakes
- Whole wheat crackers

Protein

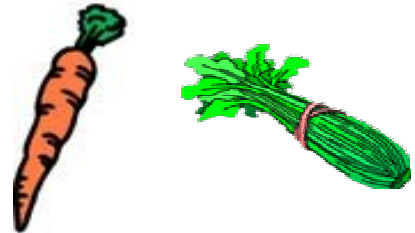
- Cheese cubes
- Chicken leg
- Chili
- Cubes of ham or chicken pieces
- Hard boiled eggs (shelled)
- Nuts and seeds
- Yogurt

Many schools have food allergy policies that do not permit peanuts and peanut products. Pay attention to memos sent home by the school.

Dive into Vegetables and Fruit

Add more colour, texture, and shape with cut-up cubes, rings, strips, or sticks of fresh vegetables and fruit. Set your child up for a lifetime of healthy habits by including vegetables and fruit with meals and snacks every day. Some suggestions include:

- Carrot and celery sticks
- Broccoli and cauliflower florets with lower-fat dressing or dip
- Grape tomatoes with cucumber and zucchini slices
- Green and yellow pepper rings
- Apple wedges (drizzled with lemon juice to prevent browning)
- Cantaloupe cubes
- Mixed berries



When choosing juice, look for "100% fruit juice" on the label. Words such as *beverage*, *cocktail*, *drink*, or *punch* indicate added sugar as well as fewer vitamins and minerals.

Pack a Safe Lunch

- Clean lunch boxes, thermal bags, plastic containers and utensils with soap and water after every use.
- Use a small insulated bag and freezer pack or frozen juice box for foods that need to be kept cold.
- Make certain that hot foods are steaming hot when placed in a thermos.
- Do not use leftovers that are more than two days old.
- Wash vegetables and fruits well with cold water.

Provide a mixture of familiar favourites with new or less well-liked foods to encourage acceptance. New foods may have to be offered repeatedly before they are fully accepted.