

# HEALTHY LUNCHBOXES



Here are some practical tips for you and your children on how to prepare a healthy lunchbox. Good food habits set early in childhood can last a lifetime. Lunches provide around one third of our daily nutritional needs, so it's important to put some thought and planning into them.

# HERE ARE SOME TIPS ON HOW TO PREPARE A HEALTHY LUNCHBOX

## KEEP IT VARIED

- Include a wide variety of foods – starchy foods, protein, dairy, and fruit and vegetables
- Try to offer different foods every day – no one wants to be eating a ham sandwich five days a week!
- Add interest to the lunchbox – try some of the following ideas:
  - Vary the types of bread e.g. pitta bread, bagels, wholemeal rolls – keep a stock in the freezer
  - Cook extra rice/pasta in the evening – these can make interesting salads
  - Theme your lunchbox on a different country, e.g. Italian – try a pasta salad, Mexican – fill flour tortillas
- Home-made soup (in a Thermos flask) is great for cold days, while salads are light and refreshing for warmer weather. Both are packed with essential vitamins and minerals
- Fluids are important for children – up to 6 cups of fluid should be encouraged daily. Milk and water are the best options. Straws and brightly coloured drinks bottles can make rehydrating more interesting!

## LITTLESTEPS LUNCHPACKER

- Check out our Lunchpacker on the Little Steps website for an easy way to choose a balanced nutritious and tasty lunch for your children each day.

[www.littlesteps.eu](http://www.littlesteps.eu)

# MAKE SURE IT'S CLEAN AND SAFE

**Remember that sandwiches containing meat or other foods that require refrigeration should be kept as cold as possible until lunch. Help keep lunches cool and safe by following these tips:**

- An insulated box or bag can be used to help keep lunches cool. A small ice pack can also be used or alternatively include a frozen fruit juice carton
- It is important that lunches are not kept in a warm place such as near radiators or in direct sunlight
- Discard any perishable food that hasn't been eaten at the end of the day
- Wash and dry reusable water bottles, lids and lunchboxes every day in warm soapy water.

**And last, always remember to wash your hands before eating lunch.**



# HERE'S WHAT SHOULD GO IN A HEALTHY LUNCHBOX

## BREAD AND CEREALS

Two portions from the bread and cereals group...

- 1 slice of bread
- 1 medium bread roll
- 1 tortilla wrap
- 1 pitta bread
- 1 small scone or plain bun
- 2 crackers or breadsticks
- 2 tablespoons / 3 dessertspoons cooked rice or pasta
- A small serving of popcorn (plain, unsalted)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Including wholegrain varieties of breads and cereals in our diet can help us feel fuller for longer and prevent constipation.



## MEAT / MEAT ALTERNATIVES

One portion from the meat / meat alternatives food group...

- 2 slices of cooked meat
- 2 slices of chicken or turkey breast
- 2 slices of cheddar cheese
- 1-2 eggs (hard-boiled, sliced or mashed)
- Half a small can of tuna, salmon, mackerel or sardines
- 1-2 tablespoons of chickpea spread e.g. hummus – try out as a dip with carrots / celery

**Note:** Fish such as tinned tuna or salmon should be included in the lunchbox at least once a week – remove any bones

### DID YOU KNOW?

Lean cuts of meat such as chicken breast are lower in salt than processed meats such as ham and bacon. Too much salt can raise blood pressure in adults and children so choose lean meat more often than processed meat



## FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

At least one portion from the fruit and vegetables food group...

- 1 large piece of fruit (e.g. 1 apple, 1 orange, 1 banana)
- 2 small pieces of fruit (e.g. 2 satsumas, 2 kiwis)
- 150ml of pure unsweetened fruit juice (one small carton is 200ml)
- Half a tin (2 tablespoons/3 dessertspoons) of fruit in its own juice
- 1 tablespoon of dried fruit (e.g. raisins or sultanas)
- 1 small bunch of grapes (8-10 grapes)
- 1 small salad (e.g. dessert bowl sized salad of lettuce, tomato, cucumber and celery sticks)
- 2 tablespoons/3 dessertspoons of vegetables (e.g. chopped or grated carrots)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Fruit and vegetables are an excellent source of fibre, vitamins and minerals, and help reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers.



## DAIRY PRODUCTS

One portion from the dairy products food group...

- 1 glass/mini-carton of milk (200ml)
- A pot of natural or low fat yoghurt (125ml) or similar quantity of custard
- 1 triangle of spreadable cheese
- 2 processed cheese slices
- A matchbox-sized piece of cheese such as cheddar, edam or gouda varieties

**Note:** Low fat dairy products are suitable for children over two years of age. Flavoured milks are also a good source of calcium but have a higher energy and sugar content than plain milk – check labels and compare brands.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Dairy products are especially important in the diets of children and teenagers as they provide calcium to support growing bones and teeth.



# HEALTHY SNACK OPTIONS (LOWER IN SUGAR AND FAT)

Sometimes it can be difficult to think of an alternative to snacks that are high in sugar or fat. Here are some tasty options:

- Fruit (e.g. an apple or banana, handful of grapes)
- Washed, raw vegetable pieces (e.g. sticks of carrot, celery, pepper and cucumber)
- Washed, whole raw vegetables (e.g. cherry tomatoes)
- Half tin of fruit (in its own juice)
- Plain popcorn (unsalted)
- Plain breadsticks, unsalted plain or wholewheat crackers, crispbreads or water biscuits served with fruit or cheese
- Plain rice cakes
- Natural or low fat yoghurt with chopped fruit (fresh, frozen or tinned in its own juice)
- Wholemeal/plain scones
- Plain biscuits (e.g. digestive biscuits, rich tea)\*

\* These are best taken with meals (when they are less damaging to teeth) and should not be taken too frequently between meals. These snacks and drinks are nutritious, but still contain some sugar, fat or salt.



# SUITABLE DRINKS FOR CHILDREN



It is important that children take in enough fluids during the day. If they do not drink enough, they may become dehydrated, thirsty, tired and weak. Drinks should always be included for break-time and lunch.

Water and milk are the most suitable drinks for children. Because of its natural sugar content, unsweetened fruit juice should be consumed with meals and ideally diluted (one part juice to ten parts water).

If you are unsure about whether a drink contains added sugar, check the ingredients list. Less common terms for sugar that may appear on the ingredients list are sucrose, fructose, glucose, maltose, dextrose and syrup. See our table for the low down on suitable drinks.

DRINK	TOOTH FRIENDLY	
Water	Best choice anytime	😊
Milk (semi-skimmed/low fat preferably)	Good choice anytime	😊
Unsweetened fruit juice (fruit juice from concentrate is suitable also if it does not contain added sugar)	At mealtimes	🙂
Flavoured milk*	At mealtimes	🙂
Diluted sugar-free squash	At mealtimes	🙂
Yoghurt or milk drinks*	At mealtimes	🙂
Smoothies*	At mealtimes	🙂
Fruit juice drink (unsweetened)	At mealtimes	🙂
Fruit juice drink (sweetened)	Not tooth friendly	😞
Fizzy drinks (including diet versions)	Not tooth friendly	😞

\*Compare brands and choose those that are lower in sugar

# 5-DAY LUNCHBOX PLANNER

We often end up putting the same things in the lunchbox everyday. Keeping lunchbox contents varied makes lunch more enjoyable. The following planner shows you the potential variety you can have.

## MONDAY

1 medium bread roll with chicken and lettuce

+



+

Handful of carrot sticks

+

Pot of low fat yoghurt

+



## TUESDAY

Small pitta bread with tuna and sweetcorn

+



+

Wholemeal scone

+



+

Carton of milk

## WEDNESDAY

2 tablespoons of cous-cous with 1 tablespoon of dried fruit

+



+

2 crackers with low fat cheddar cheese

+



+

Carton of unsweetened fruit juice

## THURSDAY

2 slices of bread with cooked ham and lettuce

+

Small container of fruit in its own juice

+



+

Yoghurt

+



## FRIDAY

Tortilla wrap with chicken, sliced peppers and lettuce

+



+

Small tub of stewed fruit

+



+

Carton of milk

### Note:

1. Lunchbox planner includes snack and lunch items
2. Smaller portions for smaller people
3. Use low fat spread, low fat mayonnaise or relish instead of full fat options

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