

Nutrition Facts

Packing School Lunches

Healthy food helps children and teens think and learn better.¹ It also gives them energy to play, be active and learn.¹ Use this as a guide to pack healthy lunches.

Making a Healthy Lunch:

Use [Canada's Food Guide](#) when packing lunches for your child. A healthy lunch will help your child get the nutrients and energy they need to take on the second half of the day. For a balanced meal, pack ½ the lunch pail with vegetables and fruit, ¼ with protein foods, and ¼ with whole grain foods. Include a healthy drink. Be sure to pack according to your child's appetite.

Pack a Variety of Nutritious Foods:

Vegetables & Fruit

- Fresh or frozen vegetables and fruits
- Canned fruit, in water
- Salsa
- Vegetable sticks
- Salad
- Unsweetened fruit sauces
- Vegetable soup
- Fruit salad

Whole Grain Foods

- Breads and buns (whole grain, pumpernickel, rye)
- Hot or cold whole grain cereals
- Whole grain rice, pasta, or quinoa
- Whole grain pita, bread or tortilla wraps
- Whole grain crackers
- Whole grain muffins or bagels

Protein Foods

- Hummus, bean dip
- Beans, chili, stew
- White milk or unsweetened fortified soy beverage
- Yogurt or cheese
- Tuna, salmon
- Eggs
- Cubed lean turkey, chicken, pork or beef

Beverages

- Make water your beverage of choice
- White milk or unsweetened plant-based beverages (e.g., soy, almond)
- Limit drinks high in sugar (soda, juice, sport drinks, sweetened milks)

*Nuts, seeds, popcorn, some raw fruits like grapes (cut into quarters) and some raw vegetables like carrots may cause choking in children under age three. Always supervise children when they are eating.

How to Make a Lunch Your Child Will Eat:

- Involve your child in planning and making their lunch. Offer them healthy choices to pick from.
- Pack portions you know your child can eat – don't overwhelm them with too much food.
- Use containers that can be opened easily.
- Use a rainbow of colours with different seasonal vegetables and fruit.
- Pack foods that are familiar and have been enjoyed before.
- Be creative with sandwiches. Try using different breads, bagels or pitas and fillings.
- Surprise them with an occasional treat.

Lunch Safety:

Remember a healthy lunch is both nutritious and safe! Follow these important tips:

- Wash hands, utensils and work surfaces with hot soapy water before and during food handling.
- Scrub all vegetables and fruit under cool running water.
- Keep hot foods hot: use a wide mouth thermos to keep foods like chili and pasta hot.
Pack hot foods in the morning and be sure they are piping hot.
- Keep cold foods cold: use ice packs and pack in an insulated bag. Pack lunches the night before and chill in the fridge - they will stay cold better.
- Make you wash any food storage supplies before and after using.



Peanut Butter-less Lunches

- Most people can easily meet their daily protein requirements by choosing a variety of foods from [Canada's Food Guide](#)
- If you are concerned that your child will not be getting enough protein at lunch without peanut butter, review the list of other options for protein foods.

Ideas for Healthy Lunches:

Lunch Ideas	Food Groupings
Whole wheat pita with salsa, chicken & cheese Cucumber slices Grapes White Milk	Whole Grain Food, Protein Food Vegetables & Fruit Vegetables & Fruit Protein Food
Whole wheat crackers Cooked cubed turkey Cheese Veggies (e.g., cucumbers, grape tomatoes) Unsweetened applesauce Water	Whole Grain Food Protein Food Protein Food Vegetables & Fruit Vegetables & Fruit
Veggies & hummus Whole wheat wrap with egg salad Fruit cup Water	Vegetables & Fruit, Protein Food Whole Grain Food, Protein Food Vegetables & fruit

Children who drink milk at school are more likely to meet their calcium needs.²

Few children get enough vegetables & fruit each day. Try to include one of each in your child's lunch.²

Pre-packaged items like ready-made lunches tend to be high in salt and fat and cost more than homemade meals.²

Revised May 2019

¹Canadian Paediatric Society (2011). *Healthy Eating for Children*. Retrieved from http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/healthy_eating_for_children

²Sparks, Sarah M. Nutrient Composition of Elementary Children's Lunches: Changes in Lunchtime Nutrient Intakes Associated with the Introduction of School Nutrition Policies. Diss. University of Prince Edward Island, 2012.