

Healthy Lunches

Packing a healthy lunch



United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child, Article 24: You have the right to nutritious food.

Encouraging a healthy lunch is a positive way to help protect your child from developing problems with obesity, tooth decay and diabetes.

What's in a healthy packed lunch?

Ideally a packed lunch should contain foods from each of the main groups, such as:

- **FILL UP FOODS** – starchy foods such as bread, pasta or rice. These are a good source of energy for growing children and for keeping hunger at bay.
- **FOODS FOR GROWING KIDS** – e.g. meat, fish, eggs and cheese for protein.
- **PACK SOME VITAMINS** – through fruit and vegetables.
- **CALCIUM TO BOOST BONES** – through milk, cheese, yoghurt, custard.
- **SAFE SLURPS** – milk or water are ideal to help ensure that your child does not become dehydrated.

Keep it cool

For safe, cool lunches, use a cool bag and pop in an ice pack or better still, add a water bottle that's been 1/3 filled with water, left in the freezer overnight and topped up with water in the morning.

A note about nuts

Although nuts and nut products are suitable for most people, it is best not to take nuts or foods containing nuts to school (e.g. peanut butter) because other children may have a nut allergy. Even if nuts are in someone else's lunchbox, this can be enough to affect some children with a nut allergy!

Ideas for packed lunches

Make lunch attractive, colourful and varied from day to day to encourage your child to enjoy it.

- **Sandwiches:** – start with a tasty base: Choose bread, rolls, soda bread, wheaten bread, bagels, pitta bread, tortilla wraps, crackers or crispbreads, ideally whole grain where possible. Spread with a little butter, margarine or low fat spread.
- **Choose your filling:** Choose from lean bacon, banana, corned beef, chicken (plain, roast or flavoured), cheese, (sliced, grated, cream or spread), cold sliced meat (e.g. roast beef, ham, turkey), sardines, salmon, tuna, egg or houmous. Try a little salad cream or mayonnaise to bind fillings together.
- **Add a little interest:** Grated carrot, coleslaw, cress, cucumber, lettuce, onion, (or scallions for a milder taste), pickled onions, peppers, pickle, pineapple, sweetcorn, tomato, scallions, beetroot, apple, tinned peach or pear (sliced). A little lemon juice helps stop cut fruit from turning brown. Add tasty raw vegetables e.g. carrot sticks, celery sticks, cherry tomatoes, cucumber chunks, raw cauliflower florets or raw pepper slices as a crunchy snack.

Some combinations you might try:

- Bacon, lettuce and tomato
- Mashed banana and chopped dates
- Egg and cress
- Egg and onion
- Cheese and sliced apple
- Cheese and beetroot
- Grated cheese and carrot
- Cheese and tomato
- Chicken and beetroot
- Chicken and sliced peach
- Chicken and sweetcorn
- Ham and pineapple
- Roast meat and pickle
- Salmon and onion Tuna and cucumber
- Tuna or sardines and tomato
- Turkey and coleslaw
- Turkey and cranberry sauce

Other lunch ideas:

- Baked beans in a wide necked flask with a soft roll
- Pasta salad mixed with tuna or chicken
- A slice of pizza and mixed salad (homemade pizza with soda bread or soft roll as a base makes a tasty change and allows you to choose healthy toppings)
- A slice of quiche, some cherry tomatoes and cucumber sticks
- Soup in a wide necked flask and a crusty roll
- Rice salad mixed with some ham

A little something to finish with:

- Fruit – fresh, dried*, a carton or tinned or fruit salad
- Yoghurt or fromage frais
- Custard or rice pudding
- Plain popcorn
- Fruit bread
- Slice of plain cake or a plain bun

* Dried fruit is best taken at a meal time as it is high in sugar. To look after teeth, it should be avoided between meals.

This information was adapted from “Hunger busters for lunch boxes”, compiled by the Community Nutrition and Dietetic Service on behalf of the Public Health Agency and based on a leaflet devised for Peninsula Healthy Living Partnership.

Save Our Smiles (Healthy break times)

In Northern Ireland, the condition of our children’s teeth is much worse than in other parts of the UK and Ireland. One of the main causes is our frequent eating of sugary foods and drinks.

Each time we eat or drink sugar, it is converted into acid. Teeth can generally withstand 3-4 ‘acid attacks’ per day before tooth enamel sustains any real long-term damage.

By limiting break time to sugar-free snacks and drinks, we can reduce the number of acid attacks on our children’s teeth (this does not mean banning snacks and puddings with sugar in them at lunchtime). Sweets, chocolate and crisps are not permitted.

Sticking to healthy snacks and drinks can also help towards avoiding other health problems such as obesity, cancer and heart disease.

No good for break time!

The following list gives examples of items which are not permitted between meals at school. The child may be asked to keep them until lunchtime or they will be removed and returned at the end of the day. This lets us give a **fair and consistent** message to all of the children.

- Dried fruit
- Any type of confectionery e.g. chocolate products, sweets and sugar free chewing gum
- Fruity sugar based drinks
- Cereal bars
- Processed fruit bars
- Crisps and crisp-like products e.g. tortilla chips, potato sticks, puffs, crackers, corn chips, prawn crackers, potato wafers
- Japanese rice crackers
- Pretzels
- Nuts
- Bombay mix
- Cakes, e.g. slices of cake, individual cakes (sponge cakes, Swiss roll, fruit cakes, banana cake, apple cake, carrot cake, gateaux, sponge fingers, Madeira)
- Buns, e.g. American (sweet) muffins, Chelsea buns
- Pastries, e.g. Danish pastries, Eccles cakes, Greek pastries, Bakewell tarts, jam tarts, mince pies, custard tart)
- Biscuits (all types) including digestive, rich tea, ginger nuts, flapjacks, shortbread, wafer.

Thank you for your support.

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