

Healthy Lunch box ideas



Many parents start the school year off with the best lunch box intentions: nutritious, well-balanced snacks or meals that won't encourage trading, tossing, or a desperate dash to the tuck shop. The third week into the new term, however, inspiration wanes and we're back to boring sandwiches and less desirable snacks.

Although packing a healthy meal or snack (that kids will actually eat) requires a little more planning and creativity than the average sandwich thrown together amid morning chaos, it isn't difficult. Here are a few ideas to get you going:

- Include the element of surprise.** Kids love variety and surprise, so think outside the box. Use different types of breads (wholewheat, seed loaf, pitas, wraps), meats, vegetables and fruits or have "theme" days, such as "Mexican", "low GI", or "vegetarian".
- Make it lovely to look at.** Well-presented food is hard to resist. Use different colours and shapes (you can use cookie cutters to shape sandwiches and fruit), make faces, or skewer it.
- Dip it! Kids love to dip.** Prepare diced or julienned vegetables or easy-to-carry fruit and vegetables like bananas, baby carrots, cherry tomatoes and grapes and pack a small container of healthy dip (low fat, plain yogurt and sour cream, and low GI hummus are all healthy dip choices).
- Design-a-meal.** Another thing that kids, especially younger ones, love is making their own food. Either get them involved the night before or pack a wrap or a pita pocket, shredded vegetables, meat, and sauce, and let the kids assemble their own lunch at school. You control what goes in it and they choose what they like.
- Include a healthy dessert.** Although the kids may eat your famous sugar-free oat cookies at home, it doesn't mean they won't be tempted to toss them for something more appealing at the tuck shop or trade with their buddies at school. A low GI chocolate brownie, cupcake, blueberry muffin, or low fat, sweetened yogurt can be a healthier trade-off.
- Use the left-overs.** Left-overs can make delicious sandwich fillings and will be especially welcome if it's a favourite dish. Don't forget the drink. Water and milk are the best beverage choices for kids. If you don't have a thermos or insulated lunch bag, freeze the drink the night before.
- Non-food surprises.** Spice things up with one or two interesting non-food items. A little note from you, a joke to share with friends (beware, if you have teenagers, they may just think you're 'lame'), a serviette or interesting fact to go with the theme, brain teaser, or anything else you can think of that your child will appreciate.

Remember, your eating habits at home and your children's preferences are important considerations when packing their lunches. It's not likely that they will eat raw vegetables with a hummus dip at school when they never see a fresh vegetable at home. And it's more likely that they will eat what you've pack when they've been consulted on the matter.