

Healthy Lunch Advice

Many parents and carers seem unsure about preparing the best lunch for their children. School dinners are a perfect solution. With nutrient based food standards as well as a wide variety of healthy and enjoyable options (including vegetarian choices), at just £1.40 per child and no preparation at home required, it is certainly worth considering. Some families may be eligible for free school meals (those receiving income support or job seeker's allowance): please ask at the main office for more information.

However, if packed lunches are your preferred choice here are some tips:

- Make packed lunch rules - e.g. no sweets - and stick to them. No deviations or little treats!
- Have a healthy lunch formula. A good one is that every lunch must include a sandwich or savoury, a piece of fruit and a yoghurt or milk-based, low fat dessert.
- Give your child water (if possible) or well-diluted fruit juice. Water will be much more appealing if you can make sure it stays cold - it might be worth investing in a good lunchbox sized flask.
- First of all, invest in proper packaging. There's nothing quite as unappealing as a soggy packed lunch. Fruit and vegetable sticks that are still fresh when the dinner bell goes are far more likely to hit the spot. Buy different-sized plastic containers with snap-on lids (make sure your child can open them!) and a lunchbox/carry case with space for an ice pack so the contents stay chilled.
- Let your child come up with ideas for what he/she wants - but make sure suggestions fall within your healthy lunch formula (above).
- Leftovers from supper the previous evening can be tasty and hassle-free. Try to plan your evening meal with the next day's packed lunch in mind. Have one basic leftover ingredient - e.g. rice, couscous, pasta and add cubes of cheese, cooked meat, tuna sweetcorn, beans, whatever you have in the fridge or store cupboard.
- If your child wants crisps, suggest alternatives such as crackers or crispbreads. You could spread a low-fat soft cheese or hummus on top to make a tasty snack.
- Buy different sorts of bread for sandwiches, rolls or wraps - e.g. pitta, bagels, granary - and steer clear of white bread.
- Low-fat soft cheese and fruit (try strawberries, kiwi fruit or banana) make great sandwich fillers.
- Tomatoes and cucumber slices make sandwiches soggy. Instead, go for grated carrot or shredded lettuce (choose a variety with crunchy leaves, such as Iceberg or Cos).

Finally, why not include a pack of raisins (or measure out a small handful from a bigger bag and put them into a small plastic container). You can also do the same with dried fruits such as apricots.

More information can be found on these websites:

<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/parents/packed-lunches>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/childhealth6-15/Pages/Lighterlunchboxes.aspx>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents/packed_lunches/