

Healthy Lunches

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A lunch box meal can be a delicious and nutritious alternative to the traditional school lunch. Packed lunch doesn't have to be pre-packaged and expensive. With a few creative ideas and simple tips, it is easy to make a healthy, packed lunch.

Children who eat lunch regularly perform better in school and are more attentive in class. Packed lunches should include a variety of nutrient-rich foods. Aim to include four of the five food groups in the lunch box. Choosing fresh foods with minimal processing is the key to keeping levels of sodium, fat and added sugars low. Consider the differences in calories and fat in the following meals:



Traditional Lunch Box Meal	Healthy Lunch Box Meal
Bologna & cheese sandwich	Turkey wrap w/ low-fat cheese, lettuce & tomato
Potato chips	Baby carrots w/ low-fat ranch dip
Pudding pack	Fresh apple slices
Fruit leather roll	Water
Juice box drink	
Calories: 838	Calories: 497
Total Fat: 39 grams	Total Fat: 21 grams
Saturated Fat: 17 grams	Saturated Fat: 6 grams
Total Carbohydrate: 101 grams	Total Carbohydrate: 53 grams
Protein: 19 grams	Protein: 21 grams
Sodium: 1531 milligrams	Sodium: 1372 milligrams

Allowing children to help choose and prepare their own lunches makes them more likely to eat a wider variety of options. Give lunch the time it deserves! Don't rush when packing. Taking a few minutes each evening to pack the next day's lunch will cut down on the morning rush and help make healthy foods a priority.

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Keep the following foods on hand to ensure lunch is interesting and varied:

- Canned light tuna
- Peanut butter
- Hummus
- Whole-grain crackers and bread
- Salsa and baked tortilla chips
- Raw vegetables – such as carrots, cucumbers, peppers, and celery cut into slices
- Variety of fresh and canned fruit (packed in juice or water)
- Low-fat yogurt
- 100% fruit and vegetable juice
- Low-fat string cheese and low-fat cottage cheese
- Boiled eggs
- Nuts such as almonds, cashews and walnuts
- Variety of seeds such as pumpkin and sunflower
- Granola bars
- Low-fat or skim milk

To prevent sandwich boredom, try alternatives such as wraps, meat and cheese roll-ups, and crackers with cheese, meat, or peanut butter. Salads topped with grilled chicken or canned tuna and peanut butter and fruit combinations such as apple or banana are also a great alternative to lunchmeat sandwiches.

Try topping a whole-grain bagel with chicken, tuna, or egg salad. When choosing these foods, go light on the mayonnaise and make sure it's a low-fat version.

Don't forget to keep food safety in mind! Use an insulated lunch bag and include an ice pack to keep foods cold. Foods such as soup can be placed in a thermos to keep them hot.



The West Virginia Family Nutrition Program (FNP) is a statewide outreach program that focuses on nutrition, food and physical activity through multiple projects, community-based initiatives and key partnerships. FNP prioritizes accountability and documents its impact on related behaviors of West Virginia's limited resource families. As a visible and critical part of West Virginia University and WVU Extension Service, FNP maintains a strong research base and uses an experiential, facilitative approach to delivering information to the people of West Virginia.

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