

## Packing a 'Healthy' lunch box



When your child goes off to school, you want to be sure that they've got everything they need. And one of their most important pieces of kit is their lunchbox, or rather what goes in it.

It's tempting to put in chocolate bars and bags of crisps, but it's much better for your child's teeth to avoid these. But just because you keep it healthy, doesn't mean it has to be boring. Fresh fruit salads, bottles of water with cartoon characters on, sandwiches cut into interesting shapes - all of these are easy to do and they won't cost a fortune either. The current national standards are as follows:

- one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables
- one portion of milk or dairy item
- one portion of meat, fish or other protein source
- one portion of a starchy food, such as bread, pasta, potato or rice

## Top tips for a healthier lunchbox

### Making sandwiches

- To avoid soggy sandwiches, make sure that you dry the salad with kitchen paper or a salad spinner. Alternatively, cut up some cucumber and add to cherry tomatoes in a separate sandwich bag.
- If your child refuses to eat brown bread at first, try buying 'whole white' sliced bread (white bread made with one-third wholemeal flour). Or you could make a sandwich from one slice of whole white bread and one slice of wholemeal/brown bread.
- Always keep a selection of breads in the freezer for sandwiches. Today there are many different types of bread that you can introduce your child to and by using a different type of bread each day make their lunchbox more interesting. Try granary, wholemeal and raisin breads; multi-grain and seed rolls; mini wholemeal baguettes and bagels and wholemeal pittas.

- Breads and rolls kept in the freezer will remain fresh. You can take out the frozen bread in the morning to make a sandwich. They defrost in about half an hour on a plate.
- Cut down on the amount of butter or margarine you use and try to avoid mayonnaise.
- Cut down on crisps, which are high in fat, and choose plain popcorn, breadsticks or dried mixed fruit (without added sugar) instead.
- Pick low-fat sandwich fillings, such as lean meats, including ham or turkey, fish (such as tuna or salmon), cottage cheese, Edam, mozzarella, or sliced banana. Always try to add a little salad to the sandwich/roll.

### Alternative to sandwiches

- Don't forget to add some vegetables to your child's lunchbox, such as cherry tomatoes, or sticks of carrot, cucumber, celery and peppers. Sugar snap peas are also a good choice because they are naturally sweet.
- In the summer, salads are light and refreshing and full of essential vitamins and minerals. Try sprinkling an assortment of seeds over the salad (sunflower, pumpkin, sesame and pine nuts) or dried fruit such as sultanas, raisins or chopped apricots.
- Cook some brown rice salad with lentils, and chop up aubergine, peppers, spring onions and some turkey or chicken to add. Pasta salads are also a good option, such as pasta with tuna and avocado, or pasta with chicken, sweetcorn, cherry tomato and spinach leaves.
- In the winter or on cold days you could make some home-made soup for your child's lunchbox. Tomato, chicken and sweetcorn, and vegetable soup are healthy options that are quick and easy to make. You could add lentils and barley to thicken the soup but try to avoid adding salt. It can be poured into a vacuum flask and eaten with some wholemeal or granary bread.
- Other options include adding a slice of home-made Spanish omelette with potato, courgette and tomato, or making a broccoli and tomato quiche. This could be made for an evening meal and a slice saved for lunchboxes the next day.
- Home-made pizza is also a favourite with children. Why not make a pizza together for an evening meal and save some for the next day's lunchbox? Add a tomato and basil sauce/paste, mozzarella cheese and plenty of chopped vegetables - peppers, onion,

mushrooms and sliced courgettes. You could also make a mini pizza with a wholemeal muffin cut in half and topped with vegetables or ham. Toast this under a grill for a couple of minutes for a fun and different snack.

## Sweets and snacks

- Include at least a portion of fruit or veg in your child's lunchbox as this will set them on their way to the recommended 5 portions a day. You could make an exotic fresh fruit salad with blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and grapes or a more traditional version with apples, bananas, grapes and oranges.
- Try adding a handful of dried fruit such as raisins, apricots, figs or prunes for vitamins and also to encourage your child to try new foods.
- Try different desserts, such as stewed fruit. You can add a spoonful or two of natural yoghurt, or you could sprinkle some rolled oats, nuts and seeds on the top for extra crunch and vitamins and minerals.
- Cut down on crisps, which are high in fat, and choose plain popcorn, or dried mixed fruit (without added sugar) instead. If your child finds it difficult to cut out crisps buy low-fat versions, crisps that you can add your own salt to or vegetable crisps.
- Replace cakes, chocolates and biscuits with scones, currant buns and fruit bread.
- Make sure that your child gets enough calcium by adding a slice of low-fat cheese, a low-fat yoghurt (preferably free of sugar) or low-fat rice pudding.

## Drinks

- Always make sure that your child is given a drink to go to school with as this will keep them hydrated and will help them to concentrate.
- Rather than drinks that are very high in sugar, such as fizzy drinks or 'juice drinks', go for unsweetened fruit juice or water.
- Add a fruit smoothie made from natural yoghurt, mixed berries and maybe a dash of honey, or maybe a home-made flavoured milk shake.

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## Tips for reducing salt, fat and sugar

### Reducing salt

- Always check food labels for the salt or sodium content. If sodium is listed and you want to convert this to salt, you multiply the sodium figure by 2.5.
- A product high in salt is one that has anything above 1.25g of salt per 100g or 0.5g of sodium per 100g. A product low in salt is one that has 0.25g or less of salt per 100g or 0.1g or less of sodium.
- Cut down on salty snacks, such as crisps and nuts, and heavily salted foods such as ready meals, bacon, cheese, and smoked fish.
- If you make your own foods (pasta, quiche, and bread) for your child's lunchbox cut down on the salt or do not add any.
- Buy low salt options wherever possible and if you are unsure whether something is high in salt, maybe put in some fruit or chopped veg instead.
- When making sandwiches, go easy with sauces and pickles because these are usually very high in salt.

### Reducing fat

- Always check the food label for fat content. As a guide, 20g or more of fat per 100g is a lot; 3g or less per 100g is considered low in fat. In terms of saturated fat, 5g or more per 100g is considered a lot and 1g or less per 100g is considered low in saturated fat.
- Use butter, margarine, mayonnaise or salad dressings sparingly.
- Try to eat crisps sparingly and buy low fat crisps where possible.
- Use high fat cheese or cheese spreads sparingly.
- Cut down on cakes, chocolate biscuits, chocolate and confectionery.
- Limit eating meat pies, pasties, fried foods and salami.
- Avoid fatty cuts of meat or chicken with skin.

### Reducing sugar

- Always read the label of any food you are buying for your child's lunchbox, whether snacks and biscuits or cakes (or dressings on ready-made salads).
- A product with a lot of sugar is one that has 10g or more of sugar per 100g. A product low in sugar contains 2g or less per 100g.
- Try to eat crisps sparingly and buy low fat crisps where possible.
- Use high fat cheese or cheese spreads sparingly.
- Cut down on cakes, chocolate biscuits, chocolate and confectionery.
- Limit eating meat pies, pasties, fried foods and salami.
- Avoid fatty cuts of meat or chicken with skin.

- Always check the ingredient list on food labels. Watch out for other words used to describe sugar such as sucrose, glucose (syrup), fructose, hydrolysed starch and invert sugar. The higher up the ingredients list they come, the higher in sugar the foods are.
- Avoid drinks that are very high in sugar, such as fizzy drinks or juice drinks. Instead, choose unsweetened fruit juice, water, milk, smoothies or yoghurt drinks.
- Replace cakes, biscuits and chocolate bars with scones, currant buns and fruit bread.
- Instead of sweets and chocolate, give your child fresh or dried fruit to snack on. Alternatively, you could try sunflower and pumpkin seeds or chopped up vegetables, cherry tomatoes or peppers.
- If your child insists on having sweets or chocolate, try to limit this to one day a week and never reward children with sweets.
- If you bake at home for your child's lunchbox, cut down on the sugar that you add. Try adding fresh strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, apricots or fruit purées.