

Keep it balanced



Healthy Lunchboxes Some ideas from the BBC Big Challenge website

When deciding what to put in your child's lunch box, it's a good idea to use the national standards for primary school meals as a guide. These standards highlight the importance of offering a variety of food from the four main food groups. Focusing on variety not only makes lunch boxes more interesting, but also means that your child enjoys a balanced lunch that helps to provide the energy and nutrients they need to grow, play, learn and stay healthy.

As well as something to drink, the guidelines advise that school meals must offer at least:

1. One portion of vegetables or salad and one portion of fruit (fresh, canned or dried can all count).
2. One portion of a milk or dairy item such as milk, cheese, yoghurt, fromage frais or a yoghurt drink.
3. One portion of meat, chicken, fish, eggs, beans or other protein source.
4. One portion of a starchy food, such as bread, pasta, rice, noodles or potatoes.

Putting it into practice

- When making sandwiches or rolls, add variety by using different bread - for example, wholemeal, pitta, granary, tortilla wraps, bagels, walnut or soft grain bread.
- For a change from bread, try rice, noodle or pasta-based salads, a slice of pizza or a colourful mixed salad served with a fresh roll.
- Use protein-rich ingredients for sandwich fillings or salads. Great examples are lean meat, chicken, turkey, tuna, egg, kidney beans, hummus or various types of cheese.
- If practical, include some salad or fruit in the sandwich, roll, wrap or pitta, for example banana; ham and tomato; or chicken, lettuce and avocado.
- Other ways to include salad or fruit are to pop some separately into the lunch box. Try cherry tomatoes, raw vegetable sticks/shapes, half a red pepper, a piece of fruit, fruit salad, small pack of dried fruit or a small can of fruit in juice.
- Aim to make sweet treats, such as chocolate, pastries or rich cakes, occasional rather than everyday items.
- Good lunch box alternatives to sugary food and crisps include: fruit yoghurt, fromage frais, a pot of rice pudding, vegetable sticks plus dip, fruit scone, fruit bun, malt loaf, oat cakes, breadsticks, wholewheat biscuits, piece of fruit cake, a small pack of seeds and/or dried fruit, a small cereal bar.
- If giving crisps or other savoury snacks use small bags (no more than 25g to 28g) and look for reduced fat and salt versions, such as crisps with no added salt.
- Include drinks that aren't just sugary water. Water, milk (plain or flavoured), pure fruit juice, fruit smoothies and yoghurt drinks make good choices. Juices still contain natural sugars so are best kept to meal times and/or drunk with a straw.



More ideas - just a click away

A survey by the Food Standards Agency found that nine out of ten children take packed lunches to school that contain too much saturated fat, sugar and salt. To help give parents more healthy ideas, it has carefully put together four weeks of lunch box suggestions, which are nutritionally balanced over each week. Check them out at: www.food.gov.uk.

Still won't forgo the crisps to try new food?

Sometimes we all need that extra bit of encouragement to try new things. It can often help to involve them in lunch box planning and/or shopping. If that still doesn't tempt them, then try the sticker reward system.

Each time they try a new, healthier lunch box food or drink, give them a star or sticker (on a wall chart or special notebook). Once they collect say, five stars, give them a small reward, such as a comic, family walk or outing (best to make it a non-food reward and agree what it will be at the outset).

Linking the new food to a positive experience - plus the fact that they may well like it once they try it - can help to establish new tastes and habits.