

How can I make brown bag lunches quickly that everyone will like?

Packing lunches day-in and day-out can often be a chore. Here are some tips to help you pack lunches that are quick to put together, and include foods that everyone in the family likes.

What we need for a healthy lunch

Aim to include a variety of choices from this list – with at least one or two of the choices being a vegetable or fruit:

- a vegetable such as leafy green salad, veggie sticks or cooked in a soup, stew or pasta;
- fruit - fresh, canned (unsweetened), or dried;
- a grain product (whole grain or enriched) such as bread, tortilla wraps, bagels, buns, crackers, pasta, rice, muffins;
- a milk product or substitute such as milk, yogurt, cheese, yogurt drink, or fortified soy beverage;
- some lean meat, fish, poultry or meat alternative such as an egg, peanut butter, hummus or other legumes in soups, salads and dips.

Ensure that your family will like their lunches

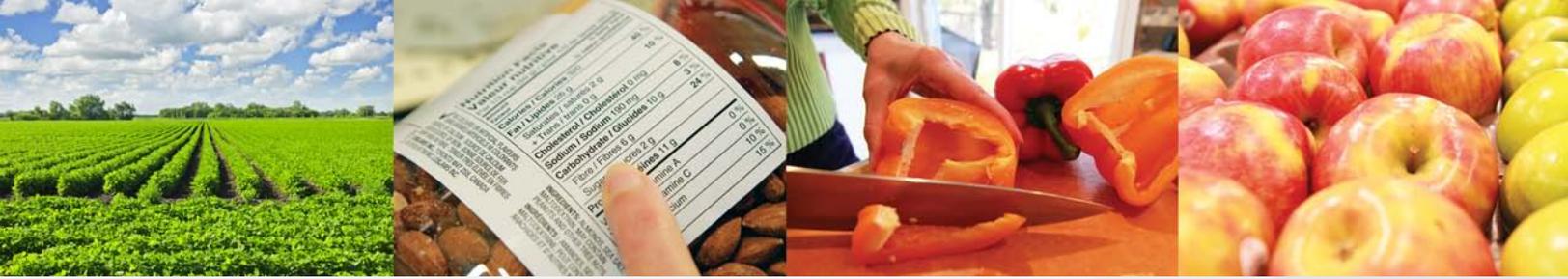
- Have a planning session. Put together a list of lunchtime favourites.
- Listen to the concerns about smell and messiness.
- Set up a schedule so that everyone takes turns helping to prepare the lunches.
- Be sure to keep school lunches free of any restricted foods, such as nuts, when packing school lunches.

Keep supplies handy to make lunch packing easier

- Have everyone choose their own special lunch bag/box.
- Set up a lunch drawer that contains all the packaging needs – insulated containers, plastic containers, plastic wrap, stickers, napkins, straws, plastic spoons, knives and forks.
- Have a special shelf or area in the refrigerator for lunch fixings.
- Keep healthy snack choices such as whole grain cereal, nuts, seeds and dried fruit in the cupboard.
- Bake healthier snacks, such as whole grain muffins, on the weekend and freeze for a easy-to-pack snack.

Ideas for great lunches

- Vary the bread - try whole grain breads, tortilla wraps, crackers, bread sticks.
- Include bite-size vegetables, such as baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, red pepper slices with a yogurt or yogurt or bean-based dipping sauce.
- Include easy to eat fruit like grapes, melon slices, orange wedges. Peel mini oranges.
- Enjoy leftover lunches based on the previous night's dinner.
- Pack thirst-quenching water in a reusable water bottle



- Some easy main meal choices:
 - last night's pasta, heated in the microwave and put into a wide mouth thermos;
 - try favourites like whole wheat macaroni and cheese, vegetarian chili or soup, heated up and put into a wide mouth thermos;
 - cheese, tuna or black bean dip with whole grain crackers and topped with sliced red pepper;
 - leftover veggie pizza on whole wheat crust;
 - hummus with pita and cut up vegetables for dipping;
 - a sandwich roll-up using a soft tortilla and any kind of filling you like, such as leftover sliced turkey, tuna salad, or hummus. Add grated vegetables or salsa before rolling.

- Simple snacks:
 - Fresh fruit and veggies.
 - Whole grain cereal mix, such as toasted oats, wheat squares, raisins and almonds or soy nuts.
 - Yogurt – try Greek-style yogurt topped with fresh sliced berries.
 - Homemade oatmeal mini muffins.
 - Roasted edamame with dried cherries.
 - A hard-boiled egg.

Workplace Idea: Office Lunch Co-ops

- Form a lunch co-op with 4 of your co-workers so you can take turns bringing lunch. This idea works best if members of the co-op have similar tastes.
- You get to eat a homemade lunch daily, but are only responsible for one lunch a week.
- Set the ground rules before you start, such as what constitutes a lunch and which foods are unacceptable.
- The group doesn't actually have to eat together, unless they want to. Discuss this in advance so no one feels obligated



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