

## *Use MyPlate to pack a healthy school lunch*

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It's back to school time and there are many preparations that have to take place before you send your children off to school. If you send lunch with your child you can be sure it is healthful if you use MyPlate as a guideline.

MyPlate was released by the United States Department of Agriculture earlier this summer as a way to help Americans be able to quickly plan a healthy meal. The icon shows a plate that is half full of fruits and vegetables and the other half with protein foods and grains. The grain icon is a little larger than the protein icon and the vegetable is larger than fruit meaning you need a little more of those. There is a dairy icon off to the side.

So, when you are planning school lunches, imagine how the foods you choose will fit on the plate. Think about choosing foods that will pack safely and that your child will enjoy. Some examples of foods from each of the groups include:

Milk: purchased at school, string cheese, cheese sticks or cheese on a sandwich, yogurt

Vegetables: carrots, cucumbers, broccoli, sugar snap peas, vegetable soup, cherry tomatoes and cauliflower

Fruit: melon, grapes, banana, apple, orange, Clementine, individual portions of mixed fruit, blueberries, plums, dried fruit, mandarin oranges

Grains: whole wheat crackers, pita bread, tortillas, mini bagels, flat or thin buns, soft pretzel

Protein: beans, peanut butter, tuna fish, turkey, boiled eggs or other leftover meat

A lunchbox meal using the above foods planned using MyPlate could include peanut butter and jelly whole wheat tortilla roll-up, grapes, carrot sticks and milk purchased at school. Another idea could be whole wheat crackers with cheese and turkey slices, cherry tomatoes and sugar snap peas, small banana and water.

Children are much more likely to consume a meal they have helped plan or prepare. Let them plan lists of foods from each of the food groups and help choose the foods at the grocery store. They can then choose something from each of the groups for a healthful lunch.

The last thing to do is make sure their food will be safe. Use freezer packs made for lunch boxes or freeze a bottle of water to put in an insulated lunch bag. With a safe lunch made of foods they have chosen, they are bound to return home happy.