The Cold School Lunch

By Bab Bell

Many an ambitious mother who puts forth every effort that her child may have all the educational advantages possible, is disappointed and puzzled when the child fails to make rapid progress and to stand well in his classes. Often the child is scolded for his seeming laziness and indifference when the trouble is not with his willingness or mental ability, but with his lunch box.

It is a common idea that rural school children have an abundance of fresh air, outdoor exercise, and good wholesome food, while as a matter of fact great numbers of them are crowded into poorly ventilated schoolrooms with little or no inducement to take outdoor exercise, and are undernourished not because they do not have enough food but because it is the wrong kind. Nowhere have children better opportunities to have the best types of school lunches than in the
country. Eggs, milk, and fruits which should constitute an important part of the diet are plentiful.

Usually, the school child eats the same foods for breakfast which are prepared to meet the needs of the men on the farm who are doing hard manual labor. For example, meat, fried potatoes, fried eggs, coffee, and bread and butter are served. After such a breakfast the busy housewife packs the school lunch hurriedly from the same food served at breakfast, adding cake or pie. Perhaps the children pack their own lunches. If so, they usually select what is most easily prepared and packed, or what appeals to them most. If left to their own inclinations, they select meats, pastries, pickles, and sweets of all types. It is natural for the child to feel drowsy and be unable to study after a lunch of this sort. A growing child at school must have plenty of good, wholesome food and food that is easily digested. The less unnecessary tax put upon his digestive organs the more energy he will have to spare for mental work. No child can study well when his system is overburdened with heavy, concentrated food.

The proper feeding of school children has been a recognized problem for several years. In the cities, the establishment of hot lunches served at school has gone far toward the solution of this problem and if this could be universally applied to the rural schools, it would mean a great improvement in the scholarship and behavior of the children. There are many places, however, where at present the hot lunch could not be successfully introduced and since the majority of school children in this state must depend upon a cold lunch, it is worth while to see that the proper foods are chosen and that they are prepared so as to be both wholesome and appetizing.

RIGHT AND WRONG KINDS OF FOOD FOR THE SCHOOL LUNCH

The school lunch should be selected carefully, keeping in mind the following points: (1) The cultivation of a rational appetite is important. Highly flavored foods should not be given to children, since they lose the desire for the good, wholesome, mild-flavored foods. (2) The child should have food containing plenty of protein to keep him growing rapidly but the protein should not always be supplied in the form of meat. Eggs and milk serve the same purpose and are much better adapted to the child’s needs. (3) A growing child needs milk in some form three times a day. Junkets, custards, and simple puddings prepared from milk are always attractive dishes. (4) Fruits should form a part of every lunch—ripe fresh fruit, canned, stewed, or baked. (5) Fat should be supplied to children principally in the form of whole milk, butter, and egg yolks. Butter on sandwiches forms an excellent
source of the fat requirement. (6) Bananas should not be given to children unless ripe. Raw green bananas are indigestible on account of the starch which they contain. If the peeling is brown, the banana is ripe. (7) Fried foods are hard to digest and should not form a part of the lunch. A large amount of fat in the stomach gives a heavy feeling and delays the digestion of the food. (8) Pie overtaxes the digestive system of the child. An occasional portion of a well made pie is not objectionable, but pie should not form the greater part of the lunch, as so often happens. (9) A few pieces of good, homemade candy add attractiveness to a child's lunch. Children naturally crave sweets, probably because they need them. There is no necessity of depriving them of the pleasure of eating candy if it is given in the right amount and at the right time. Many mothers refuse candy to their children, claiming that it injures the teeth. This is a mistaken idea. Teeth decay because of a lack of mineral salts in the diet. Mineral salts are supplied by wholesome foods given at meal time. When candy is given between meals, the child has no appetite for these wholesome foods, and therefore, does not get the mineral salts needed to develop his teeth. If the child is taught to eat candy in small amounts and at the end of a meal, there is no objection to its use. (10) Add vegetables to the lunch whenever possible. (11) Children should be taught to form the habit of drinking liberal amounts of water.

**Wholesome foods for the lunch.**—Milk or cocoa; good wholesome sandwiches—two kinds, rather than two of one kind; fresh, canned, and dried fruits; rice puddings, baked custards, junkets, gelatins; eggs in custards or hard boiled and chopped fine for sandwich filling; bread and cookies with nuts and fruits; well-cooked cereals; green vegetables; small amounts of homemade candy.

**Unwholesome foods for the lunch.**—Fried food; rich pastries—pies, fritters, doughnuts; rich cakes; sausage, fried ham; cheap candies; green bananas; meats in large quantities; pickles.

**WHOLESOME LUNCHES**

1. One chicken sandwich, one jam sandwich, one apple, one glass of milk, one small piece of cake (two graham or plain crackers and two apples for recesses).
2. Ham sandwich, bread and butter sandwich, fudge sandwich, apple sauce, one glass of lemonade.
3. Brown bread and butter sandwich, cottage cheese sandwich, celery, one orange, nut and raisin cookies.
4. Minced ham sandwich, lettuce sandwich, or graham bread and butter sandwich with celery, baked custard, two apples.
5. Chopped egg sandwich, bread and butter sandwiches, stewed prunes stuffed with nuts, milk.

UNWHOLEsome LUNCHeS

1. Biscuits and sausage, mince pie.
2. Large pieces of bread, no butter; one slice of beef steak, cake.
3. Two pieces corn bread with fried ham, two onions, one-fourth mince pie.
4. Two large soggy soda biscuits, two fried eggs, one-half custard pie.
5. Three fried ham sandwiches, two pieces cake.

SANDWICHES

Sandwiches should form an important part of every child’s lunch and they are simple, wholesome, easy to prepare and afford many possibilities of variation. The following list will be found helpful. Only two kinds of meat sandwiches are given because there is a tendency to give children too much meat for their lunches.

Bread and butter sandwiches.—Cut the bread in thin slices. Spread the butter evenly on both slices and press together.

Lettuce sandwiches.—Make a bread and butter sandwich and place a leaf of crisp lettuce, washed and thoroughly dried, between the two slices. Put a teaspoonful of salad dressing on the lettuce leaf.

Nut sandwiches.—Make a lettuce sandwich, spread one side with nuts, chopped fine and mixed with salad dressing.

Boston brown bread sandwiches.—Make the same as white bread sandwich. Lettuce and nut sandwiches may be made of brown bread.

Ribbon bread sandwiches.—Cut the Boston brown bread and white bread into sandwiches of uniform thickness. Spread with butter and alternate the brown and white until six slices are used. Trim off the crusts and slice as ordinary bread.

Date sandwiches.—Make a filling of one-half cup of stoned dates, one-half cup of English walnuts, chopped fine. Rub the two into a paste with one-half cup of sweet cream; spread between slices of buttered bread.

Fudge sandwiches.—Make fudge, beat until creamy. While soft, spread between thin slices of buttered bread. Fudge may be kept for sandwich filling if it is not cooked as hard as when served in the usual way and if it is kept in a bowl and covered with a moist cloth.

Pimento and cheese sandwiches.—Make a filling of one-half cup of cream cheese and one-fourth cup chopped pimento, add salad dressing,
salt and pepper. Spread on bread evenly. Cottage cheese may be used instead of cream cheese.

**Peanut sandwiches.**—Peanuts ground and mixed with a salad dressing make an excellent filling. The commercial peanut butter may also be used. Spread evenly between buttered bread.

**Egg sandwiches.**—Chop the whites of hard boiled eggs very fine. Mix the yolks with salad dressing and season with pepper and salt. Add the whites and spread between bread.

**Chicken sandwiches.**—Chop cold, boiled chicken and moisten with salad dressing. Spread between bread.

**Ham sandwiches.**—Slice cold, boiled ham as thinly as possible. Put between slices of buttered bread.

Various meat sandwiches may be made. The ground meats, seasoned with salad dressing make delicious sandwiches.

**Points in sandwich making.**—(1) Cut the bread in thin slices of uniform thickness. The crust may or may not be removed. (2) Spread the butter evenly over all of each slice and butter both slices of bread. The butter will keep the bread moist and will also prevent the filling from soaking into the bread, and making the sandwich soggy, indigestible, and unappetizing. (3) Use a sharp knife for slicing the bread. (4) Soften the butter by creaming or slightly heating. Nothing detracts more from a sandwich than butter spread unevenly and in large lumps. (5) It is not necessary to cut sandwiches in fancy shapes, but they may be cut in squares, oblongs, or triangles. The round or fancy cutters may be used occasionally for variety. (6) Bread for sandwiches cuts best when twenty-four hours old. (7) A crisp lettuce leaf adds to the attractiveness of all sandwiches except the sweet varieties. (8) All sandwiches before being packed into the lunch box should be wrapped in waxed paper. This prevents the sandwich from drying or from absorbing odors.

**TYPES OF CONTAINERS**

One of the most important things to consider in regard to the school lunch is the type of container. In many instances children will be found carrying food in a paper bag, or wrapped in a newspaper. This is often the result of carelessness, or the idea that a lunch may be carried in any manner. Sometimes children, boys especially, may be seen using their pockets for lunch boxes.

There are many types of carriers which cost little as shown in Figure 2. Each type has advantages and disadvantages.

A tin box or pail prevents the drying out of contents, but a mixing of odors or flavors may result. A pail which has a perforated lid over-
comes this difficulty. Tin containers are easy to clean and, if thoroly washed, scalded, and aired, can be recommended as the best type. Many of the more expensive ones are provided with different compartments, folding cups, knives, forks, etc.

Fiber boxes, while apparently inexpensive, must be replaced often, owing to the fact that they are easily soiled and cannot be cleaned. When not in use these boxes should be well aired. The most sanitary type has ventilators under the ends of the handle.

Homemade lunch boxes may be had with very little trouble or expense. Boxes in which such things as cookies, crackers, wafers, and candy are purchased may be saved and used for the school lunch. They should be neatly wrapped and securely tied. These boxes may be thrown away after the lunch has been eaten. This appeals to many children as they do not like to carry home dinner pails or clean them at dish-washing time.

Baskets are used extensively. They are light and airy but, of course, all food must be wrapped to protect it from dust and insects, and many baskets are unattractive and easily broken. They should be selected with care as to color, design, and durability and if these points are considered, the basket makes the most attractive type of container.

If a more expensive type of container can be afforded, the thermos lunch box is ideal. Such a lunch box costs from $2 to $2.50. A thermos bottle may be bought separately if desired.

Every lunch should be neat, attractive and wholesome. It is impossible to fulfil any of these three requirements unless the proper materials for packing are used.

**ESSENTIAL MATERIALS FOR GOOD PACKING**

1. A good container.
2. Waxed paper such as is used for covering butter may be saved from cracker boxes or bought at the rate of thirty sheets for a nickel.
3. Plain white paper napkins without colored flowers which will fade on foods may be bought for ten cents a hundred.
4. A good bread knife.

Other conveniences are seal tight jars for semi-liquid foods, thermos bottle or thermos food jar, ramekin dishes, and a spatula for spreading butter.

In some rural schools, each child is given a small compartment in which he keeps a plate, knife, fork, spoon, glass, cup, and salt shaker.

When packing the lunch, first line the container with paper napkins; then wrap each article of food separately in waxed paper, placing
those to be eaten last in the bottom of the container. Articles should be packed compactly in order to prevent foods from being shaken about. Empty spaces may be filled in neatly with paper napkins.

A cold lunch is not any too appetizing at best. Our aim should be to have our lunches as attractive as possible so that they may be eaten with that relish and enjoyment which result in more complete digestion.

It should be borne in mind that very few schools are provided with a comfortable attractive and sanitary place in which the lunch may be eaten. However, the teacher should see that the following points are observed during the lunch hour: (1) Room thoroughly aired before lunch hour. (2) Hands washed before eating lunch. (3) Desk clean—paper napkin used for table cloth. (4) Upright position at desk. (5) Paper napkin in lap. (6) Elbows at side; never on desk. (7) Lunch eaten slowly and quietly. (8) No talking when mouth is full of food. (9) Knife is used only for cutting food. (10) Lunch eaten in order—dessert last. (11) Drinking of water when desired, but food must not be swallowed hurriedly by being washed down. (12) Pleasant conversation.
FIG. 2.—SOME GOOD LUNCH CARRIERS

The dinner pail and basket are probably better than the others, but those who can afford it, will find the more expensive thermos box still better.