



## Brown Bag School Lunches

It's that time of year again: back to school! This year take some time to plan for nutritious, exciting brown bag lunches. Here are some tips to consider:

- Plan ahead – this is 90% of the battle; poor & boring lunches usually happen when they aren't planned
- Get the children involved – if your child has some say in what he/she eats, they are more likely to eat it! Children can help plan a lunch menu. Weekends are a great time to plan lunches for the following week.
- Once a lunch menu is decided for the week, prepare a grocery list. When you've returned from the store, prepare foods so they are ready to be packed (Example: wash fruit and vegetables; grate cheese, portion out yogurt, etc.).
- Be organized – have all necessary supplies for lunches (Example: reusable containers, bags, plastic wrap, napkins, thermoses, etc.) in a convenient location.
- Make lunches the night before. If your child is old enough, have them make their own lunch, with your input.
- Pack healthy foods

Poor nutrition is a concern for some children these days. There are many processed, less nutritious foods in the marketplace. A poor diet can have serious consequences on a child:

- It can affect learning and concentration, energy levels, and may be one of the causes of obesity in children.

What is a healthy diet? A healthy diet provides foods from Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating, in the amounts recommended. There are four food groups in Canada's Food Guide:

<u>Food Group</u>	<u>Children need</u>
Grain Products	5-12 servings/day
Vegetables & Fruit	5-10 servings/day
Milk Products	2-4 servings/day
Meat & Alternatives	2-3 servings/day

A healthy lunch should contain all four food groups. A healthy diet for children also limits foods high in salt, fat, and/or sugar (Examples: pop, potato chips, store bought cookies with icing, etc.)

- Budgeting tips for lunches:
  - Use reusable containers – it's less expensive to buy frozen juice and make it than to buy the little drinking boxes, for example. Individual portions are more expensive than large servings.
  - Buy foods in bulk, when they're on sale. Example: bread (you can freeze it).
  - Purchase less "ready to eat" convenience foods. Example: all-in-one packages of cheese, crackers and meat.
  - Reduce spending on less nutritious foods like chips, pop, and chocolate bars. These food items provide little nutrition and are a waste of money. They should be eaten only occasionally.
  
- Preventing food spoilage and food poisoning:
  - Keep your hands and countertops clean when making lunches
  - Keep lunch boxes and thermoses clean
  - Try using small ice packs or freezing juice containers to help keep foods cool until lunch time
  - Milk, juice and yogurt can be frozen – they should thaw by lunch time
  - Use a thermos to keep foods hot or cold
  - Remind children to wash their hands before eating

➤ Fun ideas

Here are some fun ideas you might want to try to make lunches more exciting:

- Pack special occasion lunches. Example: orange foods on Halloween; green foods on St. Patrick's Day, etc.
- Put fun stickers, small trinkets or school supplies in with the lunch.
- Use colorful products. Example: napkins
- Give funny notes or riddles
- Cut sandwiches in different shapes
- Use fun utensils or straws

➤ Recipe ideas

Try new recipes for lunches. Before sending new food items, have your child try the new items at home first. Make sure they aren't too weird or different, or else they might be embarrassed to eat them in front of their friends. There are many books and pamphlets available at libraries or bookstores for brown bag lunches. Now is the time to review some of these to get new ideas for the school year. Some examples include:

- Peanut butter sandwiches made with: grated carrot, banana, applesauce, sliced apples/pears or raisins
- Tropical ham sandwiches (with ham, pineapple and banana)
- Cheese and apple sandwiches
- Banana bread and cheese
- Yogurt with added fruit or nuts from home
- Wraps or soft tacos - fill them with what your child likes
- Different breads or buns for variety Example: Pitas, tortillas, submarine buns, etc.
- Vegetables with dip
- Homemade pudding with added fruit
- Hot soup or chili in a thermos
- Homemade Pizza

Have your children involved in planning new ideas for their lunches. The more a child is involved with his/her lunch, the less likely it will be thrown out.

➤ Buying lunch at school

Some children have the opportunity to purchase lunch or some food items at school. Be aware of what the school is providing. Are they healthy choices? Knowing what is being served at school will also help to plan other meals in the day, in order to provide variety and balance in the diet. You might also want to get involved at the school, where appropriate, when it comes to food.

➤ Resources:

Through your local Community Health Centre, information is available on Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating and on other nutrition materials

Nutrition Web Sites:

[www.healthyeating.net](http://www.healthyeating.net)

[www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)

[www.5to10aday.com](http://www.5to10aday.com)

[www.cdha.nshealth.ca/publichealth/schoolAgeChildren.html](http://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/publichealth/schoolAgeChildren.html)

Recipe books for lunches: at your local bookstore or library

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## Sharing Lunches May Put Some Children at Risk

Sharing or swapping lunches is much more common than many people realize. While it may be frustrating to learn that your child is giving away your prized homemade baked goods or fresh fruit, sharing and swapping lunches may put children with severe food allergies at risk.

If your child has a severe food allergy, please talk to them and their teachers about which foods are a concern and reinforce that sharing or swapping lunches is not a good idea. Some children react to very small amounts of a food allergen. Even using the same knife to slice food or butter bread can provide enough food residue to trigger a reaction. These reactions can be life threatening within minutes. While precautions to prevent an allergic reaction may be strictly followed at home when preparing lunches for the allergic child, other children who do not have food allergies do not need to consider the same precautions. If lunches are shared, the allergic child may unexpectedly be exposed to traces of an allergen.

All parents should be asking their children what they manage to eat at lunchtime and whether they share or swap parts of their lunches. Children should have some say in what goes into their lunches to ensure that their lunch is appealing to them. Work with your children to make certain their lunch is nutritious and fun.

If sharing or swapping lunches is a reality in your child's classroom, talk to your child about expectations and give them some guidelines about sharing and swapping lunches.

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