

Lunch box solutions: Tips for parents

(NC)—Help get the school year off to a good start with these helpful tips for packing healthy and nutritious lunches. Why not cut out and post this list on the fridge as a constant reminder:

- Have a plan! Plan a weeks worth of lunches, then make a shopping list. Involving the children in the shopping will help them connect with their lunch. They may recognize the foods from what they bought in the store. Include grains, fruits, veggies, dairy and protein foods.
- Include foods your child likes. Your goal is to get your children to eat the lunch you pack. Make sure the foods are healthy, fresh and appealing.
- The more variety, the better. It will help keep your child interested in their lunch. Lunch does not have to be a sandwich. Try pitas, crackers and spread, sliced meat and cheese, veggies and dip. Small children tend to eat small amounts - include healthy snack foods in small packages.
- Prepare lunch the night before. Get the children involved in preparation. Do any prep work that may be needed like cutting vegetables, putting crackers in bags, and cooling the drinks.
- Put something fun in their lunch. A little surprise. This could be a

dinosaur shaped sandwich, colourful pinwheel sandwich, cool stickers or a note from Mom or Dad. Cookie cutters are a fun way to spice up sandwiches.

- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold to avoid contamination. If using a heat thermos, make sure to follow directions clearly. Use a cold pack or frozen juice box in an insulated bag to keep foods chilled.
- Ask the child to bring home the food they do not eat. This will allow you to see how much they are really eating.
- Healthy lunch options to add to your grocery list include:
 - Low fat milk
 - Low fat yogurt
 - Low fat cheese
 - String cheese
 - Cottage cheese
 - Low sugar jams/jellies
 - Chopped veggies
 - Whole fruit
 - Chopped fruit
 - Dried fruit
 - 100% fruit snacks like Sun-Rype Fruit to Go or Squiggles
 - 100% fruit juices (not sugar-added drinks)
 - Trail mix, pretzels
 - Mini rice cakes

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How to make healthy fun

(NC)—As most parents know, kids love to turn any eating occasion into an active experience. Parents usually have a “don’t play with your food” rule at mealtimes, but to keep kids occupied until their next meal parents can try relaxing this rule at snack time. Let kids try their hand at constructing their own snacks. Not only will this keep them busy for a while, they are also more likely to sample whatever nutritious foods they’re tinkering with. By encouraging your child to assemble his or her own snacks, you just may be sparking a lifelong interest in cooking – or the arts! The important thing is to provide kids with choices when it comes to snacking. If all the choices are reasonably nutritious ones, then everybody’s happy: kids get to choose their snacks, and parents get to ensure that they are eating healthfully.

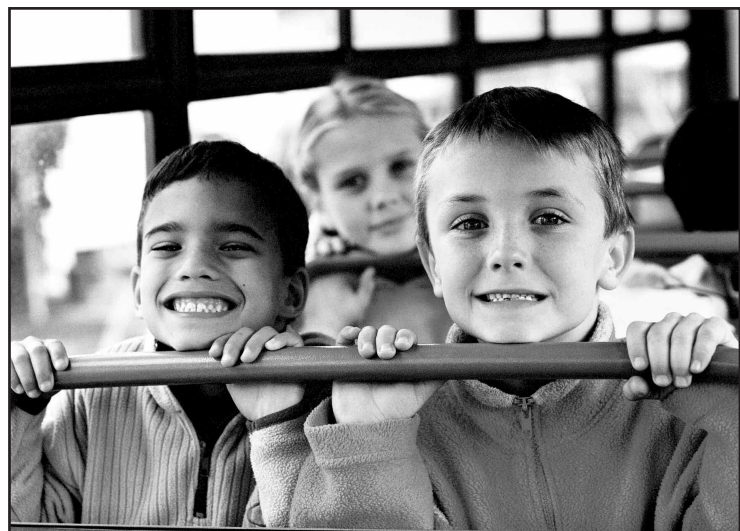
By keeping this in mind, parents will find that it is possible to make fruits, vegetables, lean protein, low fat dairy products and whole grains appealing to kids. Here are some favorite tried and true methods for making kids shout, ‘hooray for healthy foods!’

- Give kids a paper plate to use as a ‘canvas’ and encourage them to make ‘pictures’ using carrot and celery sticks, cucumber and bell pepper slices, sugar snap peas and cherry tomatoes served with a batch of nutritious hummus, bean dip or salsa.
- Set out five or six bowls containing various trail mix ingredients - a

combination of nuts, fruits and cereals that can be mixed according to kids’ individual tastes. Encourage kids to name their trail mix concoctions and set them up with brown bags and crayons/markers to create colourful ‘packaging’

- Equip kids with a few slices of bread, lunchmeat and cheese, and a couple of miniature cookie cutters to make tiny, whimsically shaped sandwiches
- Mix and match a variety of different flavours of a 100% fruit snack like Sun-Rype Fruit to Go Squiggles and encourage kids to use their imagination to come up with different uses for the funny-shaped fruit snacks (always choose 100% fruit snacks over sugar-based candy snacks)
- Use half an English muffin, a whole pita or a tortilla as a pizza crust and let kids smear on tomato sauce, sprinkle low fat mozzarella cheese, and top with chopped vegetables and a little bit of lean meat if desired. Heat for a few minutes in the toaster oven or microwave, and then cut the pizza into teeny-tiny triangles for extra kid-appeal.
- Put out a selection of melon balls, berries, pineapple chunks, and cubed peaches, pears or apples along with some frilled toothpicks or thin pretzels (for younger kids) and encourage kids to make their very own fruit kabobs

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Making the right choices: How to teach your kids

(NC)—It’s a scene that plays out daily after school everywhere. Kids head home, to daycare or after school activities and are immediately on the lookout for something to eat. After-school or anytime, snacks can and should be a part of every child’s balanced diet. A snack is not just an indulgence: active kids with fast metabolisms and small-capacity tummies need a between-meal pick-me-up on a regular basis. It can be six hours or longer between school lunch and dinner at home, and that is too long for most kids to go without refueling. More often than not, when asked to name their favorite snacks, kids are likely to say candy, chips, or cookies.

As parents become savvier about nutrition they also realize that kids need to be taught early on the difference between ‘real food’ snacks and ‘junk food’ snacks. Here are some great ways for parents to teach kids how to make healthier choices on their own.

Parents are their children’s most important teachers.

Talk to kids about smart food choices and emphasize the nutritional value of ‘real food’ snacks - how important they are for learning and doing well in school, at sports and play and for feeling good and staying healthy.

Use positive messages.

They help avoid the stress and guilt that can lead to poor eating patterns as children get older. Let kids know that all foods can fit into a healthy diet and that the key is moderation. Discuss the importance of eating foods from the four food groups in *Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating* and choosing fewer foods from the ‘other’ category. Encourage your kids with positive messages like “colourful fruits and vegetables will give you bursts of energy”.

Set expectations.

It’s easier for children to make healthy food choices when they know the family’s “nutrition rules of the road.” For example, everyone in the family starts the day with breakfast, milk is the beverage served at meals, and after-school snacks are made up of fruits and vegetables and treats are okay too but are saved for special occasions.

Make good nutrition convenient.

Pack the kitchen with ready-to-eat foods that are both nutritious and fun for kids. For example, instead of high-fat, high sugar snack foods such as chips, candy, cookies and pop, stock the snack cupboard with an assortment of 100% fruit snacks such as Sun-Rype Fruit to Go or Squiggles. Leave fresh cut vegetable sticks in the refrigerator or whole-grain cereals

on the table. Freeze 100% fruit juice to make homemade popsicles or colourful ice cubes.

Involve children.

Let children be part of the decision-making process. Have them help plan meals, make the grocery list, unpack groceries and prepare meals. While shopping let kids pick three healthy snacks and one treat. Use these activities

as an opportunity to talk about healthy food choices.

Make Mealtime Family Time.

Eating together as a family promotes good eating habits and overall good nutrition. Involve kids in the planning and preparing. It helps them learn that mealtime is important family time.

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Are you a good snack detective?

(NC)—Ever think of yourself as a ‘snack detective’? It seems that’s a role parents have to play in making sure the snacks they choose for their kids’ lunches are good ones.

Sometimes it can be tough to get past your first impressions of a snack product. We’ve all experienced times when you’ve brought something home you thought was healthy that turned out to be loaded with sugar or other undesirable ingredients. Packaging graphics and various call-outs can often make it confusing – particularly for busy parents who are rushing from one thing to the next.

Thankfully, Health Canada has made it a whole lot easier for us to really understand what we are buying by implementing a new Nutrition Labelling system for every food product. The new Nutrition Facts tables include calorie counts as well as intake information for thirteen core nutrients based on a specified amount of food. Additional information on understanding Nutrition Facts tables is available online at www.sun-rype.ca/nutrition or the Health Canada website.

One quick and simple reference point for shoppers is the ingredients list on the side or back of packaged food products. Parents should look at the first two or three ingredients listed, as ingredients are listed in an order consistent with the product’s composition (most to least). Ideally, you’ll find ingredients you recognize and know to be healthy. If, however, you find a list that starts with sugar or contains an abundance of fabricated ingredients, the red flag should go up. Be aware that sugar can also be referred to as glucose/fructose, maltodextrin, or corn syrup. One particularly challenging snack that falls into this category is the ever-popular fruit snack. So many of the available options are loaded with sugar in one form or another. Your best bet is to look for fruit snacks that have fruit purees and fruit concentrates as the first ingredient! Consider products like Sun-Rype Fruit to Go or Squiggles – 100% fruit snacks that contain no artificial ingredients.

Another easy checkpoint in evaluating foods for your snack cupboard is to look for products that feature the Health

Check logo. A program created by the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Health Check is based on Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating. The program’s goal is to promote healthy eating, making it easier for families to make wise food choices. To find out more about this program visit their website at www.healthcheck.org.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, be sure to involve your kids in considering their food choices. *Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating* provides easy guidelines for parents and kids to follow. Your kids can quickly get to a point where they will recognize a healthy choice over one that’s not. You may find that involving them will get them to eat foods that provide the nutrients they need, making your job as a parent just a little bit easier. A little education really does go a long way!

So the next time you’re trying to decide what to buy for your kids’ lunches and after-school snacks, take a few extra seconds in the aisle and practice your ‘snack detective’ skills!

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