

Creative answers to packing lunches kids will eat

By Amber Wilson

Packing a school lunch is one of the best ways for your kids to get the nutrients needed for a productive school day. Studies show that well-nourished children perform better in the classroom, so fill their brown bags with a mixture of whole grains, lean protein, fruit and vegetables. The following tips will help you to pack a tasty school lunch that your kids won't want to trade.

1. **Involve your kids** – Studies show children are more likely to try a food they had a hand in creating. Sit down with your kids and brainstorm ideas for healthy lunch items. Encourage your kids to try new foods by taking them to the grocery store or the farmers market and letting them pick a new fruit or vegetable to try. The cafeteria is a bartering community and your kids will trade foods from their lunch box that they don't want to eat.



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2. **Give your sandwich a makeover** – Who said a sandwich needs to include two slices of bread? For a new twist on an old favorite, make a wrap instead. Grocery stores carry whole grain tortillas and flat breads that can be filled with a variety of sandwich ingredients. Try turkey, avocado and cheese, hummus and veggies or peanut butter and banana slices.

3. Create your own lunchable – Make your own healthy version of a lunchable with your kids' favorite snacks. Pack a large Tupperware full of whole wheat crackers, string cheese, veggies (such as baby carrots, strips of bell pepper, pieces of broccoli and cherry tomatoes) and 2 tablespoons of low-fat ranch dressing or hummus. Add a low-fat yogurt for a sweet ending to the meal.

4. Substitute your chips – Crunchy snacks are a favorite lunch box item, but try swapping out the usual fried chips for a healthier, crunchy option. Baked chips, air-popped popcorn, flavored rice cakes, pretzels, trail mix and veggies with dip all provide crunch without the unhealthy fat.

5. Slip in a sweet treat – Cookies and baked goods are a fun treat once in a while, but sugar usually leads to an energy crash later in the afternoon. Instead, satisfy your child's sweet tooth with snacks that also provide some nutrition, such as fruit, granola bars, trail mix, low-fat yogurt or low-fat chocolate milk.

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