

# Lunch Box Tune Up: Tips for Packing a Healthy Lunch

It's time for the kids to head back to school and packing a healthy lunch for your children is a great way to get them the nutrients they need to power through the school day. Unfortunately, lunch boxes are often filled with packaged 'convenience' foods like full-calorie soda, chips, and cookies. This can add up to a lot of excess fat, sugar, sodium and calories that may contribute to long-term health problems like high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity. These extra calories may also make kids sluggish or cranky in the afternoons.

A recent study by the American Heart Association shows that there are NO children in the United States, ages 12 – 19, with ideal health (4-5 components of a healthy diet), as it relates to the Healthy Diet Score.

When deciding what to put in your child's lunch box, it's a good idea to include foods from different groups.

Focusing on variety not only makes lunches more interesting, but also helps your children enjoy a balanced lunch that will provide the energy and nutrients they need to grow, play, learn and stay healthy.

## The Basics for a Healthy Lunch Box:

Try to include:

- One serving of vegetables or salad and one serving of fruit (fresh, canned or dried can all count).
- One serving of a low-fat or fat-free milk or dairy item such as a low-fat cheese stick, a yogurt cup, or some cottage cheese.
- One serving of meat, chicken, fish, eggs, peanut butter, beans or another protein source.
- A healthy drink such as water or 100% juice.

## Easy, Quick Ways to Pack a Balanced Healthy Lunch With Punch!:

- Swap the white bread for whole wheat varieties for added boosts of fiber. Whole wheat bread can also be more filling.
- If your kids are bored with the traditional sandwich, try whole wheat pita or flatbread/tortilla wraps that you can quickly turn into sandwich swirls.
- Switch from bologna, salami, pastrami or corned beef, and other fatty luncheon meats to low-fat alternatives such as lean turkey or chicken breast.
- Sneak veggies like lettuce, cucumbers, or shredded cabbage in between slices of lean turkey or ham on a sandwich or in a wrap.
- Use peanut butter in moderation: 2 tablespoons (about the size of a ping pong ball) provides about 190 calories and 16 grams of fat.

• Try using a thinner layer of peanut butter and substituting jelly with banana or thin apple slices for a healthier spin on an old favorite.

• Skip high-fat mayonnaise. Consider a small serving of reduced fat mayonnaise or skip it entirely and try using something with more flavor and fewer calories like mustard instead.

• Include low-fat or fat-free cottage cheese with carrots, cherry tomatoes, fresh berries, or melon. This makes for a calcium-rich, high-protein lunch.

• Swap traditional fried chips for baked potato or corn chips.

• Aim to make snack treats occasional rather than everyday items. A small serving of animal crackers are lower in fat and sugar than regular cookies, doughnuts, brownies and other baked goods.

For more tips on raising healthy kids, log on to [www.heart.org/healthykids](http://www.heart.org/healthykids).



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