Healthy Lunchboxes

A Guide for Parents

NHS guidelines suggest that a balanced lunchbox will contain something from each of the following groups:

- a starchy food such as bread, pasta or rice
- a protein source such as meat, fish, egg or beans
- a source of calcium such as yoghurt, cheese or milk
- fresh vegetables or salad
- fruit (including fresh fruit juice and dried fruit)

Make fruit fun and easy to eat by chopping it into small pieces and including a spoon. You can stop fruit such as apples and bananas from going brown by tossing them in a little water mixed with lemon juice and storing in an airtight container. You can use cookie cutters on fruit that can be cut into larger slices, such as melon or pineapple.

Try not to include foods high in fat and sugar on a daily basis. Make healthy swaps, such as crunchy carrot sticks instead of crisps, or a fruity yoghurt instead of a cake.

Don't forget your leftovers. If you've had a pasta meal, for example, the leftovers can quickly be turned into a nutritious pasta salad with the addition of a few chopped fresh vegetables. Leftovers from the Sunday roast also make fantastic sandwich fillings.

Chiller packs are readily available at the supermarket – pop a couple in the freezer so you always have one ready to slip into the lunchbox to keep things cool and fresh. Alternatively, you could freeze juice boxes and pop one of those in the box – by lunchtime it will have defrosted, all the while keeping the lunch fresh.

Plan a week's lunches in advance – try using this handy **Weekly Lunchbox Planner.**

You can make sandwiches more interesting by using different types of breads – try tortilla wraps, chapattis, pitta or bread flavoured with herbs, seeds or cheese. It's also fun to use cookie cutters to cut sandwiches into different shapes.

If your child is bored of sandwiches, try making a colourful pasta or rice salad, or send them with a dip such as hummus and a handful of breadsticks and veggie sticks.

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Reduce your use of single-use plastics by avoiding plastic spoons and drinks with straws, and using foil instead of plastic wrap. There are lots of reusable plastic food containers available now and it's also more cost-effective to buy larger pots of foods such as yoghurt and decant a portion into a reusable container.

Get your kids involved in making packed lunches – even the youngest can have a go at buttering a piece of bread and adding a filling. Set up a production line and you'll be surprised how quickly the lunches get done!

Don't be tempted to include too much in your child's lunchbox, especially for younger children. Think about what you would serve them for a normal lunch at home. Often, children struggle to eat large amounts and they are always keen to finish quickly so that they can go outside to play with their friends!

It's a lovely idea to include a note in your child's lunchbox to make them smile and remind them that you are thinking about them while they are at school. Try these **Lovely Lunchbox Note Cards.**