

What Should I Pack in My Kid's Lunchbox?

By Joanna Chodorowska

This is a question I get from clients all the time! "How do I pack healthier lunches for my children?" When I was growing up, we lived five houses from school and I came home for lunch most days. Mom always made us something wholesome: salad or a green vegetable, sometimes half a sandwich with leftovers from dinner or a tuna salad with celery and kidney beans. There was usually a fruit for dessert, sometimes a cookie. And yes, in case you are wondering, my friends wondered back then what I was eating – what, no chips? No Ho Ho's? Mom had it right back then, and you can too.

So what can you do? Make dinners at home, and help your children make their own lunches. Some fun vegetables you can pack for snacks are regular carrots, sugar snap peas, corn on the cob, or cut up red or orange peppers. If you pack a sandwich, choose lean meats and non-processed lunch meats. Make your own turkey breast and slice it up for sandwiches. It is a lot more economical, even if you buy organic turkey breast vs. counter-bought items full of nitrates and sodium. Yuk! But you have to make sure you add at least two to three large leaves of a green lettuce (Bibb, red leaf, romaine, green leaf, all good choices). Choose a multi-grain bread, or even gluten-free multi-grain bread. (Udi's brand makes great choices.) If you choose to use mayonnaise, use the real stuff, not the non-fat, chemical full version. If you use butter, try to use a grass-fed dairy butter – again, use real butter, not the manufactured kind. Then pack a fruit. Make it a different fruit every day of the week. Variety makes it fun. My mom used to cut the hamburgers from dinner in half (smaller discs) for our sandwiches and used rye bread over wheat. This is how we always ate, so it was not a surprise for us at lunch time. Sometimes we had soup – remember those Thermos containers just for soup? Why not make your own and pack it for your kids? At least you will know what the ingredients are and know it was also made with love, not 1700 mg of sodium per ½ cup serving.

The next step to making healthy choices is to start reading the labels on the products you buy. You will want to avoid



these ingredients: high fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated fat, artificial colors, artificial sweeteners (including Splenda, sucralose, aspartame, and Nutrasweet), preservatives (sodium nitrate and nitrate, sodium erythorbate, diisocyanate, etc.) and any ingredient that basically is not a real food. So replace Doritos with Garden Of Eatin' brand chips. Replace Gatorade with plain water and lemon wedges. Choose natural peanut butter (or almond or cashew butter) instead of Jiff or Skippy. These small changes can make a big difference in nutrition as well in your children's behavior. Just because it is convenient does not always mean it is healthy. Choose wisely, but start making those healthier choices at home, so you can plan your lunch meals better, too.

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