

10 Tips for Packing a Healthy School Lunch

Sue Frederick, author of A Mother's Guide to Raising Healthy Children

- 1. Keep it simple.** Don't try to be fancy or gourmet. Chances are, your child prefers simple foods. Try tuna or cheese sandwich squares accompanied by rice cakes and peanut butter, as well as fresh fruit (such as an apple or strawberries).
- 2. Think of ways to get protein into the lunch** instead of just carbohydrates. Add a cheese stick, a small cup of tuna salad with pickles, or sliced meat and veggies in a pita pocket. Provide a cup of peanut butter for dipping apple slices into or smearing on top of mini rice cakes.
- 3. Ask your child to help.** If you bring your child to the store, she will help you plan the lunches and therefore be more likely to eat them. Ask your child specific questions: Do you want a salad in your lunch this week? How many times? Do you want baby carrots? Hot noodles? As she talks to you about her choices, you'll figure out ways to satisfy your desire for a simple, healthy lunch as well as her desire for something tasty.
- 4. Prepare on Sundays.** Fill little plastic containers with vanilla yogurt and frozen blueberries or strawberries and put them in the freezer. Each morning, take one frozen container and put it in your child's lunchbox. By lunchtime, it's a delightfully cold, healthy treat. My daughter also likes cups of frozen green beans, peas or corn (which you can pack and freeze on Sunday). These will thaw to a nice crunchiness by lunchtime. On Sunday, you can also take organic popcorn that comes already popped, pretzels, and whole-wheat crackers, and put them in a couple of plastic containers to drop into the lunch box during the week.
- 5. Heat up leftovers** in the morning, and put them in the thermos. Warm noodles with red sauce, rice and beans in a thermos, and chicken soup provide wholesome lunches on cold days.
- 6. On hot days, make a smoothie** in the morning and put it in a thermos. Add whole-wheat crackers, sliced cheese or turkey, and some toasted tamari almonds. This sort of creative lunch keeps your child interested in the food and provides protein as well as fruit (from the smoothie).
- 7. Provide fresh, raw veggies with dip.** My daughter happily eats baby carrots, broccoli heads and red pepper strips as long as I provide a tasty Ranch Dressing or Yogurt Dip.
- 8. Make a big salad on Sunday** and put a couple of small servings into plastic containers. These will be fresh lunchbox additions until Wednesday. (Put the dressing on the side in a separate container).
- 9. Always have a fast, easy lunch ready for Friday mornings** when you've run out of food and ideas. For example, cook a frozen pizza on Friday mornings and drop a slice into a thermos. Add a bag of sliced green and red peppers for munching, and your child has a fun Friday lunch. Or, pack cold cooked pasta (in fun shapes) with a tasty dressing to dip them into.
- 10. Shop** for your child's lunches **at a natural foods store.** This way you'll know that everything you buy is free of preservatives, nitrates, additives or unnecessary sugars and salts. And choose organic whenever possible. You're making an investment in your child's future health.