

Tired of packing the same old lunch? Try these ideas to add variety

- Use different types of bread, such as pitta bread, bagels, wholemeal rolls, wraps or crusty rolls.
- Cook extra pasta or couscous in the evening and include it as an alternative to bread.
- Theme your lunchbox on a different country, eg Italy – add a pizza slice, Mexico – fill flour tortillas.
- Home-made soup (in a thermos flask) is great for cold days, while raw vegetables and salads are light and refreshing for warmer weather. Both are packed with essential vitamins and minerals.
- Get your child excited about packed lunches. Let them help choose their lunch. Pick a colourful lunchbox or let them decorate one with stickers.

Children often need to see and taste new foods several times before they accept them, so try out new ideas at teatime or the weekend before including them in a lunchbox.



What to pack in a healthy lunchbox

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates



Starchy foods will help your child feel satisfied, as well as being a good source of energy and B vitamins. Choose wholegrain or higher fibre versions with less added fat, salt and sugar. Why not try some of these suggestions?

- 2 slices of bread
- 2 small bread rolls
- 1 tortilla wrap
- 1 or 2 mini pitta breads
- 1 scone or currant bun
- 1 bagel
- 1/2 a soda or wheaten farl
- 2 tablespoons of cooked rice, pasta or couscous
- a slice of deep pan pizza - choose one with a vegetable or fruit topping, such as pineapple, sweetcorn or peppers

Did you know?

If your child doesn't like wholegrain bread, try the new breads made with half white and half wholemeal flour to boost their fibre intake.



Fruit and vegetables



Help your child get their five a day by putting two portions of fruit and vegetables in their lunchbox (ideally one fruit and one vegetable). A portion could be:

- 1 medium sized piece of fruit, eg apple, orange, banana, pear
- 2 small fruits, eg kiwi fruits, satsumas, plums
- 1 cup of grapes, cherries or berries
- 1 large slice of pineapple or melon
- 1 heaped tablespoon of dried fruit, eg raisins, or 3 dried apricots (this should be part of lunch rather than a snack because of its high natural sugar content)
- 1 cereal bowl of salad, eg lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and celery
- 3 heaped tablespoons of fresh or frozen veg, eg chopped, sliced or grated carrots, peppers, or sweetcorn
- 150ml of pure unsweetened fruit juice or fruit smoothie
- 3 heaped tablespoons of fruit salad (fresh or tinned in fruit juice) or stewed fruit.

For younger children (4–6 years), reduce these portion sizes by about half, then increase the amount as they grow. Older primary school children should be eating full portions.

Visit www.nhs.uk/Livewell/5ADAY/Pages/5ADAYhome.aspx for more information.



Did you know?

You can only count fruit or vegetable juices as one of your fruit and veg portions. Remember fruit juice and/or smoothies should be limited to no more than 150ml per day in total.

Dairy and alternatives



Make sure your child is getting enough calcium by putting one of these in their lunchbox:

- a container/mini-carton of milk (200ml)
- a pot of yogurt, custard or rice pudding
- a matchbox-sized piece of cheese such as cheddar, edam or gouda varieties
- 2 triangles of spreadable cheese

Children over two years of age can have lower fat dairy products if they are eating well. Milk can be plain or flavoured. Flavoured milks are a good source of calcium but have more added sugar than plain milk. Compare brands by checking the nutrition labels, and only offer these at mealtimes.

Did you know?

Lower fat milk, cheese and yogurt still has the same amount of calcium as full fat versions, which supports growing bones and teeth.



Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins



Protein is important to help your child grow, so include one of the following in your child's lunchbox:

- 2 slices of cooked meat
- 2 slices of chicken or turkey breast
- 1–2 eggs (hard-boiled, sliced or mashed)
- half a small can of tuna, salmon, mackerel or sardines
- 2 tablespoons of chickpea spread, eg hummus – try it as a dip with carrots/celery

Try to include a portion of fish at least once a week. Remember to remove any bones and choose tinned fish in spring water rather than in brine or oil.

Did you know?

Sliced processed meats are higher in salt than meat you have cooked yourself. Why not use leftovers from dinner the night before?

Nuts and other food allergies

Nuts and nut products are suitable for most people; however, a child who has a nut allergy can be affected even if there are nuts in someone else's lunchbox. Many schools have a 'no nuts' policy but there may also be children in the school with allergies to other foods. Your school will be able to provide advice on what foods should be avoided.



You can find out more about food allergies at www.safefood.eu/Food-Safety/Food-Allergies/Individual-food-allergies.aspx

Healthier treats

Many schools are now developing healthy eating policies and are encouraging children and parents not to bring sweets, chocolate, crisps and fizzy drinks for break or lunch. Below is a list of healthier options that can be provided in your children's lunchbox as a treat.



- Fruit loaf
- Mini fruit muffin
- A plain bun or slice of cake
- A slice of carrot cake or banana bread
- Sugar-free jelly pots or fruit jelly
- Yogurts or pots of custard or rice pudding

Remember

Healthier treats may still contain sugar, so these should only be eaten at mealtimes when they are less damaging to teeth.