

Tips for Kids

Lunch

Bring it or buy it? .

The benefits of brown-bagging it are twofold: **It's cheap, and it gives you more control over the nutritional content.**

To keep kids interested, get them involved in the **planning process**. Find out what they want, and make a list of at least five lunch menus that they really like. Try to include at least one **fruit** or **vegetable**, one **calcium-rich** food, and incorporate **whole grains** whenever possible.

Consider investing in an **insulated lunch case**, using **freezer packs** to keep cold foods cold. And put an end to squashed sandwiches by packing them in hard containers with lids, instead of using plastic baggies or foil.

Here are some tips to help you think **beyond sliced bread**. Add a little variety by **mixing and matching** choices from each of the following groups to ensure a nutritiously balanced lunch that **won't end up in the trash can**.

Grains/Carbohydrate Foods

Look for products that list a 'whole' grain as the first ingredient and provide at least three grams of fiber per serving.

- Whole wheat pita
- Whole wheat tortilla or sandwich thins
- Whole grain hamburger/hotdog bun
- Whole grain bagel thins
- Whole grain English muffin
- Whole grain crackers (i.e. Kashi TLC, Wheat Thins or Triscuit Thins)
- Whole grain chips (i.e. Sun Chips, Baked Tostitos)
- Granola bar (i.e. Kashi TLC Bar)
- Dry cereal (i.e. Multi Grain Cheerios, Wheat Chex, Quaker Oatmeal Squares)
- Low-fat granola
- Cooked grains, served cold (e.g. couscous, tabbouleh, whole wheat pasta)

Meats/Protein Foods

Protein-rich foods provide staying power, helping to sustain energy levels, improve alertness, and fend off afternoon hunger pangs.

- Deli sliced meat: chicken, turkey, ham, roast beef
- Chicken strips (grilled – homemade, refrigerated, frozen)
- Crab meat (or imitation crab meat)
- Leftover dinner meat (cook extra the night before)
- Chicken or tuna salad (with low-fat mayonnaise for fewer calories)
- Tuna packet (seasoned or plain)
- Turkey hot dogs
- Chili/turkey chili (fresh or canned)
- Soup (i.e. black bean soup, vegetable soup, gumbo)
- Beans (i.e. black, red, or white; can be heated or eaten cold)

Meats/Protein Foods (continued)

- Chickpeas
- Cheese (cubes, sticks or, individually-wrapped sizes)
- Cheese slices (experiment with different varieties)
- Yogurt (Greek yogurt has highest protein content)
- Cottage cheese
- Hard boiled eggs
- Peanut butter
- Other nut butters (i.e. almond butter, cashew butter)

Microwaveables

These foods often provide both carbs and protein in one. Look for products that contain whole grains, and when reading labels, be aware that 20 grams of protein provides the equivalent of three ounces of meat.

- Frozen pizza (i.e. Kashi, Healthy Choice, Smart Ones)
- Frozen dinners (i.e. Amy's, Kashi, Healthy Choice)
- Veggie burgers and hotdogs (just add a whole grain bun)
- Veggie 'chicken' nuggets
- Lean Pockets (look for those 'Made with Whole Grain')

Spreads

Use a variety of spreads, sauces, and condiments for one of the fastest ways to liven up lunch.

- Guacamole
- Avocado
- Mayonnaise (or low-fat mayonnaise)
- Horseradish mayonnaise
- Hummus
- Bean dip
- Pesto
- Ranch dip or dressing
- Remoulade sauce
- Laughing Cow spreadable cheese
- Cream cheese (or reduced fat cream cheese)
- BBQ sauce
- Mustard – any variety

Fruits and Vegetables

Ask kids to select a different one for each day; add a spritz of lemon juice to cut fruits to prevent browning. Pack a dip for the veggies if it'll help kids eat 'em.

- Berries
- Grapes
- Apple
- Pear
- Banana
- Plum
- Kiwi
- Melon
- Mango
- Canned fruit (packed in 100% juice)
- Apple sauce (no sugar added)
- Cherry tomatoes
- Baby carrots
- Broccoli florets
- Cauliflower florets
- Cucumber slices
- Red and yellow pepper slices
- Vegetable juice
- Celery (can add cream cheese or peanut butter)
- Spinach leaves (as salad or added to sandwich)
- Lettuce (for salad or to make lettuce wraps)
- Mixed salad greens (pack salad ingredients in separate containers so they don't get soggy)

Good-for-you extras: *These side items provide at least some nutritional benefit, ranging from calcium to fiber to heart-healthy fats.*

- Freeze-dried fruit (i.e. Funky Monkey)
- Pudding (i.e. Jello Sugar Free pudding cups)
- Yogurt (i.e. flavored low-fat yogurt)
- Soy crisps
- Nuts
- Beverages including cartons of milk, soy milk and/or water

Adapted from The Times-Picayune, written by Molly Kimball, RD, CSSD, Sports & Lifestyle Nutritionist with Ochsner's Elmwood Fitness Center.