

## **School Lunch Tips**

Home prepared school lunches have better nutrition quality, less expensive and safe to eat. Here are some tips to help you pack healthy and nutritious school lunches that your kids will love.

1. **GO BEYOND SANDWICHES.** Try creating your own lunch with salad or meats rolled up or cut into squares, cheese slices and whole-wheat crackers. Leave out the candy. Substitute a cookie instead. Cook a pizza and pack cold slices. Offer pita or veggies with dip in a small cup.

2. **DON'T PACK THE SAME THING EVERY DAY.** Everyone likes surprises, and no one wants to eat peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich, carrots, apple and cookie every single day.

3. **KEEP A SUPPLY OF SHELF-STABLE FOODS FOR BUSY DAYS** when lunches need to be packed quickly. Prepackaged applesauce, pudding, fruit cups, crackers, granola bars and protein bars are all easy lunchbox supplements. Don't forget the spoon, if needed.

4. **PACK AMOUNTS THAT YOUR CHILD CAN EASILY EAT:** Pack the amounts that your child can easily eat. Packing excessive amounts will not make him eat more at school.

5. **DON'T FORGET THE SNACK.** Even if they're buying lunch, it's nice to tuck a piece of fruit, a protein bar or granola bar, a small package of crackers, into their school bag to avoid a lull in their learning by 10 a.m.

6. **FOOD SAFETY IS IMPORTANT.** Wash and dry the food container or lunch box thoroughly, wash your hands and clean your food counter. Make sure raw eatables are stored separately from any ready-to-eat foods such as fruits or vegetables and make sure all foods are washed thoroughly before packing.

7. **KEEP COLD FOODS COLD.** Include a frozen ice pack or frozen juice box if you pack any perishable foods, such as meat, chicken, anything with mayonnaise or hard-cooked eggs. If your child likes soup or chili or hot leftovers, pack the hot food in an insulated thermos.

8. **PACK A MOIST DISPOSABLE TOWELETTE WITH EVERY LUNCH** and remind kids to wash their hands before eating. This is the single best way to keep your kids from picking up other kids' illnesses at school.

9. **AVOID EMPTY CALORIES:** Many juice pouches and boxes are less than 10 percent juice - and 90 percent flavored sugar water. These are empty calories with no nutrition for your child. Water is a better choice. Try giving them Pediasure chilled in a thermos.

10. **PROVIDE A VARIETY OF FOODS, EVEN IF THE PORTIONS ARE VERY SMALL.** Try to pack fruits and vegetables every day. Add dairy or calcium-rich foods such as yogurt or cheese. Protein-rich foods including peanut butter, tuna and cheese are brain foods that take longer to digest. Mix these with some carbohydrates for quick energy, but be careful with the sweets, which can cause your child to get tired and

lose focus after they're digested - and they don't provide much nutrition either.