

School Lunch Your Kids Will Munch

Eating for Learning

Studies show that well-nourished children are able to concentrate longer and perform better at school. Children are ready to learn and are more alert when they eat a variety of choices as recommended by Canada's food guide.

What to Include in a School Lunch

Foods from Canada's food guide provide the nourishment kids need to grow, learn and play.

Follow these easy steps:

1. Pack plenty of vegetables and fruit!
2. Include a protein food like lentils, chickpeas, bean dip, a hard-boiled egg, cheese, canned light tuna or salmon, yogurt or sliced lean meat.
3. Include a whole grain food like pasta, brown rice, quinoa, a pita, a bun or a tortilla.

Other considerations

- On special food days like pizza, pasta or sub day, pack some vegetables and fruit to help balance the meal.
- Children are more likely to eat lunches that they have been involved in planning and preparing.
- Children usually have about 20 minutes to eat lunch at school. For younger children with smaller appetites, keep portions small. Peel fruit when possible and cut up foods into smaller bite-sized pieces.

Allergy Alert

Peanut butter, peanuts and other nuts are healthy food choices. However, there are children with allergies to these foods in many schools. A number of schools have banned foods containing peanuts or other nuts from lunch boxes to protect the safety of children with allergies. Check with your school about foods that are not allowed in your child's classroom.



Don't Forget a Drink

Choose everyday:

- Water
- Plain low-fat milk (2%, 1% or skim)
- Plain fortified soy beverage

Avoid:

- 100% fruit juice
- Fruit drinks, punches or cocktails
- Flavoured milk
- Flavoured fortified soy beverage
- Sports drinks
- Regular and diet pop
- Energy drinks
- Iced tea

Make Your Own “Lunch Kits”

When you're in a hurry, convenience foods may seem tempting, but regularly sending pre-packaged lunch kits to school may not give your child what they need to be healthy and stay energized all day long. Store-bought lunch kits are often low in fibre and high in salt, sugar and saturated fat. They are also expensive! Make your own lunch kits using reusable containers with sections.

Tasty and nutritious ideas

Vegetables & Fruit

- carrot sticks
- celery sticks
- turnip sticks
- strips of bell pepper
- cherry tomatoes
- broccoli florets
- cauliflower florets
- sugar snap peas
- roasted eggplant
- roasted zucchini
- apples slices
- pear slices
- grapes
- berries
- clementine wedges
- melon cubes

Protein Foods

- plain low-fat milk or fortified soy beverage
- cheese cubes, slices or strings
- yogurt or yogurt dip
- canned light tuna
- canned salmon
- hummus or bean dip
- cubes or slices of leftover chicken, turkey, pork or beef
- lentils or chickpeas
- tofu
- hard-boiled egg
- sunflower or pumpkin seeds

Whole Grain Foods

- brown or wild rice
- whole grain pasta
- whole grain bagels, tortilla, pitas, breads, buns, English muffins or crackers
- whole grain chapatti, roti or naan
- quinoa, plain oatmeal or other cooked whole grains
- whole grain cereal

Include Veggies and Fruit in Every Meal and Snack

Many children do not eat enough vegetables and fruit. To help children get enough each day, include vegetables or fruit in every meal and snack. Seasonal vegetables and fruit that are locally-grown usually offer the best taste, freshness and value. Also, buying local helps to support our farms. Frozen and canned vegetables and fruit are also great options, especially on days when you run out of fresh produce. Rinse canned vegetables to remove most of the sodium. Choose unsweetened applesauce and canned fruit packed in water or juice (instead of syrup).



Avoid the Sandwich Slump

Here are a few fresh ideas for the most common lunchtime food.

Whole Grain Foods

- Whole grain mini pita pockets
- Whole grain bagel or whole wheat bread
- Whole grain soft tortilla
- Whole grain mini submarine bun
- Whole grain naan bread

Protein Foods

- Hummus or bean spread
- Egg salad, tuna salad or chicken salad
- Leftover pieces of chicken or turkey
- Sliced cheese

Vegetables & Fruit

- Shredded lettuce, cucumber slices
- Chopped celery, sliced grapes
- Grated carrot, grated apple
- Bell pepper slices, chopped tomato



Cut sandwiches or wraps into smaller pieces. Children usually like “finger foods” that can easily be picked up and eaten in two small bites.

Balanced School Day

Instead of the traditional two recess breaks and a lunch break, students on a Balanced School Day will have two nutrition and activity breaks. Regardless of how your school organizes their day, children need the same amount of food. The only difference is when the food is eaten.



Nutritious Snacks

Children need a lot of nutrients for healthy growth and development. Nutritious snacks can help. Try to include a vegetable or fruit with each snack.

Tasty ideas

- Strawberries with yogurt
- Grapes with a whole grain mini muffin
- Red pepper rings with hummus
- Pineapple chunks with cottage cheese
- Apple slices with cubes of cheese

Snacks to limit

- Potato chips, vegetable chips, corn chips
- Cheese puffs, chocolate bars
- Granola bars with marshmallow or chocolate
- Candies, chewy fruit snacks
- Cakes, doughnuts, pastries, cookies
- Processed meat sticks or deli meat (e.g., pepperoni, ham)

Keeping Teeth Healthy

Avoid sending sticky foods to school (such as dried fruits) if your child cannot brush their teeth after eating. Encourage your child to drink water or rinse their mouth with water after eating.

Food Safety Tips

- Use insulated lunch bags and a thermos to help keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Warm the thermos with boiling water before filling it with steaming hot food.
- Freezer packs can help to keep lunch foods cold.
- Wash all vegetables and fruit before packing.
- Do not re-send sandwiches or hot foods. Whole fruits and non-perishable snacks can be re-packed.
- Do not re-use wrappings.
- Wash reusable containers and utensils at the end of the day with soap and hot water.
- Teach children to wash their hands before and after eating.



For more information, including recipe ideas:

unlockfood.ca • canada.ca/foodguide

To speak to a Registered Dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at **1-866-797-0000**

Distributed by:

Adapted with permission from Regional of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services

bright bites 

