



Packing lunches for happy, energetic kids

Lunch is a nice break from the work and play happening at school. It is also an important time for children to refuel for the rest of the day. Here are some tips for packing a delicious and nutritious lunchbox.

Balance is key. Children need a mix of protein, carbohydrates, and fats throughout the day. This variety fills their belly, fuels their mind and body, and helps regulate energy and emotions during the day. Even more importantly, this combination is the recipe for a tasty lunch.

Protein Power. Protein in the lunchbox is key for helping children feel satisfied throughout the day. Include something like a hardboiled egg, beans, roasted turkey or chicken, nut butter, yogurt, or cottage cheese.

Colorful carbohydrates. Fruit and vegetables are colorful ways to add energy and flavor. Whole grains are another great source of energy. These include foods like oats, brown rice, quinoa, popcorn, and whole-grain pasta, bread, and crackers. These higher fiber carbohydrate choices will provide a steady release of energy, keeping your child energized throughout the day.

Flavorful fats. Flavor makes food tasty to eat. Fat is one important part of flavor, and a little goes a long way. Oils, dips, and dressings are great flavor boosters for vegetables and whole grains. Nuts and seeds, cheese or yogurt, and avocado also have nutritious and delicious fat.

Pull it together with a theme. Now that you know the parts and pieces of a lunch, how do you put it all together? Having a go-to list of ideas can make it easy to pull together what you have in the kitchen. Tex Mex, snack platter, pizza, and breakfast are a few ways to piece together foods. For example, breakfast for lunch could include a hard-boiled egg with peppers, string cheese, grapes, and whole-grain crackers. It could also be a whole-grain waffle with nut butter or yogurt, banana, and cucumber.

Pack at your peak. Are mornings hectic? Pack lunches the night before. Does it work better to do everything at once? Take extra time on Sundays to pack lunches for the week. This makes it a grab-and-go in the morning. Rather than a back and forth of figuring out what to pack.

Have children take the lead. With some guidance about what kinds of food to include, children can pack their own lunches. Consider laying out all the ingredients and guiding them through putting it together. For older children, you can provide a menu of what is for lunch. They can find and put everything together. To give children even more independence, you can give them a

checklist of healthy options. Provide structure by telling them how many choices to pick from each category. Younger children will need help, but they will enjoy being part of the process. Once you have a delicious and nutritious lunch packed, make sure to include an ice pack. This keeps food safe until it is time to eat.

References

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Source: Courtney Luecking, Extension Specialist for Nutrition and Health

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