

# SNACK CLUB

Supporting Nourished, Active Children in Kentucky

## Packing lunches? Start with this planning guide

Packing lunches may feel like a chore. Investing a little time to plan can go a long way in saving time, money, and energy. These practical tips will help you plan easy, tasty, and nutritious lunches for growing minds and bodies.

**Invest in reusable containers.** Spending money on reusable containers will help save money over time. They will also allow more options for what you can pack. An insulated bag and ice pack will help keep cold foods cold and safe to eat. An insulated food container can help keep warm foods like soup warm. Kids can refill reusable bottles with water throughout the day.

**Consider lunch limits.** To help children get the most out of the much-needed lunchtime boost, find answers to these questions.

- *What time is lunch?* Lunchtime may be early or later in the day. With early lunches, frozen foods may not have time to thaw. With later lunches, your child might need a snack to bridge the gap between breakfast and lunch.
- *How long is lunchtime?* The lunch period may be as short as 20 minutes. With short lunch periods, it is helpful to send foods that do not require preparation and that are easy to eat. For example, soup or salad may take longer to eat than cheese and crackers or a sandwich.
- *Is the school nut-free?* Because of the increasing numbers of children who have food allergies and potentially serious outcomes, some schools do not allow peanuts or tree nuts. Examples of tree nuts include almonds, cashews, pecans. If your school is nut-free, try alternatives like sunflower or soy nut butter.
- *Can children open packages?* Whether you pack reusable containers or prepackaged items, make sure your children can open them. If not, you can either open packages before you put them in the lunchbox or put the food in something that is easier to open.
- *Is there access to a microwave?* Access to a microwave means you can send foods that need to be heated up. Hello leftovers. If there is no microwave, make sure foods are ready and OK to eat as packed.
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**Make a plan.** When planning lunches, aim to include a protein, whole grain, fruit, and vegetable. Choosing two to three staples from each of these groups will provide options for the week without breaking the bank. Protein ideas include hardboiled egg, yogurt, cottage cheese, and canned beans. Whole grain ideas include tortillas, crackers, pasta, and frozen waffles. Fruits can be fresh, frozen, or in a fruit cup or pouch. Vegetables can be fresh, frozen, or leftovers from dinner.

**Keep it simple.** Create a list of five to 10 main dish ideas. You can use this over and over with the same or different ingredients. For example, you can use a whole-grain tortilla for a peanut butter and banana roll up one day and a bean and cheese quesadilla the next. Serving familiar favorites in different ways gives children nutrition they need while also exposing them to new textures and flavors.

**Get children involved.** Include your children when you make the lunch plan. Invite them to help with grocery shopping. This can provide time to find new foods to try. A little planning and creativity will help you pack lunches that fuel your children for the second part of their day.

## References

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