

Healthier Packed Lunches for Children

Information for Parents



Eating well is important. Children need to eat well as it will give them energy and nutrients to grow and develop, be healthy and active. A healthy, enjoyable lunch gives children the energy they need to learn and play at school. This leaflet provides information on how to pack a healthier lunch. Please support the school in helping your child to lead a healthy lifestyle by following these guidelines.

What is a healthy packed lunch?

A healthy packed lunch is a balanced meal providing a variety of nutrients, to be found in four food groups:

Starchy Foods

Base each meal on a starchy food, such as bread, potato, rice, pasta as starchy foods give energy, fibre, vitamins and minerals.



- ✓ Bread, try different types, such as pitta bread, wraps, chapattis, bread rolls, baguette or crackers.
- ✓ Other starchy foods, such as pasta, potato, rice or noodles.
- ✓ Whole grain varieties are best for fibre, which is vital for a healthy digestive system.

Meat and Alternatives

Add some protein, for example meat, fish, eggs, beans or pulses. Protein foods build muscles and provide minerals.



- ✓ Lean meats, such as chicken or turkey.
- ✓ Cheese, such as cheddar or soft cheese.
- ✓ Egg, such as boiled, quiche or omelette.
- ✓ Meat alternatives, such as quorn or tofu.
- ✓ Dishes containing pulses, beans or meat, for example dahl, stew or bean salad.
- ❖ Use butter, margarine, mayonnaise or salad dressings sparingly, because these can be high in fat, or use lower fat alternatives.
- ❖ **The school has a no nuts policy as some children are allergic to nuts. Please support the school in keeping our children safe by ensuring packed lunches do not contain nuts.**

Milk and Dairy Foods

Include a dairy product or dairy alternative, such as yogurt, custard or semi-skimmed or skimmed milk. These foods provide calcium necessary for strong bones and teeth, as well as providing protein and vitamins. Lower fat varieties are healthier.



Fruit and Vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are full of vitamins, minerals and fibre necessary for the body to function properly and to keep you strong and healthy. You can use fresh, frozen, tinned or dried. **The school expects all packed lunches to contain at least one piece of fruit, vegetable or salad.**



- ✓ Add tomato, lettuce, cucumber or grated carrot to a sandwich.
- ✓ A vegetable dish, such as salad or roast vegetables.
- ✓ Fresh fruit, such as apple, banana, pear or melon pieces.
- ✓ Dried fruit, such as raisins, apricots or figs.
- ✓ Fruit salad (fresh or tinned in juice) or vegetable salad.
- ✓ Finger foods, such as cherry tomatoes, cucumber sticks or celery. Good with a dip, such as raita or salsa.
- ✓ Use fresh fruit and vegetables, which are in season to help the environment and enjoy variety!

Drinks

Drinks, especially water, help children to concentrate and feel well. Water is freely available in school.



Snacks and Confectionery

Foods high in fat can cause excessive weight and may lead to heart disease. High sugar foods are high in calories and bad for teeth. High salt foods may increase blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease and some cancers. **For this reason, packed lunches should not contain chocolate, sweets, fizzy drinks or sugary drinks.**

For a healthier snack:

- ✓ Replace sweets and chocolate with plain biscuits, dried fruit, a small bunch of grapes or fruit salad.

- ✓ Replace cakes and pastries with fruit bread or malt loaf.
- ✓ Replace salted savoury snacks with rice cakes, breadsticks, plain popcorn or cheese and crackers.

On **Fridays** children may bring in **one** 'treat' item of food such as a small bag of crisps, a small chocolate bar or cake bar.

Unhealthy Food

The adults at school monitor what children bring in their packed lunches to support them in leading a healthy lifestyle. If children bring in an item of food that does not adhere to the packed lunch guidelines, then the item will be taken away. A note will be sent home to parents/carers explaining why the food was removed.

If a child's packed lunch is wholly inappropriate, the child will be given an alternative. The school will provide the child with a school meal and the parent will be charged. Parents will be invited into school to discuss healthy alternatives.



Further information can be found in the Packed Lunch Policy on the school's website. If you have any questions about packed lunches then please speak to your child's teacher.

Practical Tips for a Healthy Lunchbox

- ✓ Try to vary the contents of the lunchbox daily. That way you can ensure your child is getting the variety of nutrients their bodies need to function and grow.
- ✓ Involve your child in preparing their lunchbox. They are more likely to enjoy food they have made themselves.
- ✓ Wash your hands before handling food. Wash fruit and vegetables before use and put food in clean containers.
- ✓ To keep food fresh, make sure it is stored properly as lunches packed the night before need to be stored in the fridge. If using rice, make sure it is cooled quickly and stored in the fridge overnight. To keep your lunch fresh during the day, use a cool bag and put in a frozen drink or reusable ice pack.
- ✓ Keep different breads in the freezer so you can just take out and defrost what you need for one day's lunchbox. Using different breads will make the lunchbox more interesting and enjoyable.
- ✓ If your child refuses to eat brown bread, try a lighter variety or make sandwiches using a slice of white and a slice of wholemeal bread.
- ✓ For variety, use pitta strips, crackers, bread sticks, or fruit and vegetable finger foods with a dip.
- ✓ Always try to add a little salad to a sandwich. To avoid soggy sandwiches, dry the salad before adding it to the sandwich or put it in a separate sandwich bag or tub.
- ✓ Make a salad using rice, potato or pasta from the night before, mixed with vegetables, beans and so on.

For more information and advice go to:

<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>

