



Little COOKS Club



HEALTHY LUNCH BOXES FOR KIDS: WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED?

The UK Food Standards Agency offers this list of what ought to be inside healthy lunch boxes for kids.

- 1 portion starchy food, such as bread, pasta, or rice;
- 1 portion milk or dairy food;
- 1 portion fruit;
- 1 portion vegetables;
- 1 portion protein, such as meat or fish.

Okay, that's the bottom line. But how do you go about getting all that into those lunch boxes?

STARCHY FOODS

- Rice salads made with brown rice, or pasta salads made with wholegrain pasta, are good sources of starch.
- Samosas or quiche are also popular.
- Rice cakes are great fibre-filled additions to healthy lunch boxes, especially the wholegrain ones. Avoid those that are flavoured - they're usually coated with salty flavourings.
- Sandwiches are a top favourite lunch box item. They don't have to be boring, though. There are so many different types of breads available in the shops now. Try something new: seed loaves, fruit loaves, high fibre bread, low GI bread, pitas, brown bread seeded rolls, pumpkin bread, focaccia, ciabatta, and wraps.

Ideas for Sandwiches:

- Peanut butter and banana.
- Mashed banana and finely chopped dates.
- Banana slices with cottage cheese and honey.
- Cream cheese, ham, chopped celery and sultanas or raisins.
- Grated cheese and salad with a little of their favourite dressing.
- Leftover roast meat with salad and chutney or tomato sauce.

- Egg/tuna or chicken mayonnaise with salad.
- Grated biltong.
- Mashed avocado pear.
- Avocado, thickly sliced, with crumbled grilled bacon.
- Cold roast beef. As a relish, cook finely sliced onions until slightly charred and leave to cool.
- Spread breads with black olive paste, pesto or hummus, then add filling.
- Make bruschetta: grill slices of ciabatta, or other open-texture bread, on both sides. Rub with cut garlic if you wish. Drizzle olive oil over the bread, topped with mashed soft cheese, hummus and chopped tomato, or Parma ham. Pack close together in a box and cover with foil to keep the topping in place.

MILK/DAIRY FOODS

- Milk is a great drink for lunch boxes. If your child prefers more flavour, add Milo to the milk.
- Containers of yogurt with added chopped fresh fruit.
- Cheese. Kids love lunchbox cheeses. Cube the cheese and slot onto toothpicks with cherry tomatoes or gherkin.

FRUIT

- Buy small, sweet apple varieties. Peel citrus fruit and wrap tightly in foil. Pears and kiwifruit are good for lunchboxes - add a teaspoon for scooping. Small bunches of grapes always go down well. Buy what is in season, which is far more economical and also adds variety to a child's diet.
- A handful of dried fruit - apricots, raisins, pears - makes a change, and counts towards five a day for kids.
- Bananas are wonderful for an energy boost. Pack them carefully so that they do not get too bruised.
- Invest in some small, sealable pots, and send cubed melon or watermelon, mixed blueberries and raspberries, stewed apple with cinnamon, stewed dried apricots, diced peach.

VEGETABLES

- The sandwich is a brilliant way to get green leafy veg onto the menu - shred lettuce or baby spinach for sandwiches.
- Grated carrot or cabbage, sliced cucumber, finely chopped peppers.
- Make a vegetarian sandwich filling, like hummus, roasted veg in pitta.
- Use pesto to give extra flavour to sandwiches.

- Carrot sticks. Also celery, peppers of all colours, sugar snap or snow peas (mangetout), cherry tomatoes. A small pot of dip with these is fun; go for homemade hummus or something low fat.
- Soups are lovely in winter, and you can use just about any combination of vegetables. Heat to just below boiling, pour it into a small, warmed flask or portable coffee mug and it'll be just the right temperature at lunchtime.
- Make veggie bits a daily must in your children's lunch boxes. Half a cold cooked corn cob, bean salad, a vegetable-based dip or pate, cold roast vegetables such as peppers, courgettes, squash (these are a good snack, or you can use them in sandwiches).

PROTEIN

- You definitely need some protein in those sandwiches as well - jam is useless. Ham and cold roast chicken is the most popular choice, but try not to serve meat every day of the week. Choose lean, unprocessed meats whenever you can.
- Cheese is another popular source of protein in lunch boxes for kids, but it is high in fat so don't stuff those sandwiches with it too lavishly. You can buy low fat types, but I don't think much of them. Cottage cheese and cream cheese are good sandwich fillers.
- Fish is a great source of protein, and many children really like tuna, which you can mix with sweet corn or peppers, or dress with pesto. I also use canned salmon.
- Pulses are good veggie options for protein. Use chick peas to make hummus, or make up a mixed bean salad.
- Eggs, hard-boiled, whole or mashed with a little pesto or mayo.
- **Peanuts, and other nuts, contain protein. Some schools don't allow them in lunch boxes because of allergy fears. PLEASE CONSULT YOUR SCHOOL ABOUT THIS and then add something else if nuts are not allowed.**
If you've had a great healthy supper one night, save a portion to use in a packed lunch. Pasta bakes, curries, casseroles - many children will happily eat these cold, or the school may have facilities for re-heating food, particularly for older children. Or pack hot foods that are fairly liquid in a small vacuum flask and provide a fork or spoon.

DRINKS AND SNACKS

- Always send your child to school with water.
- Fruit and yogurt smoothies, blend bananas with yoghurt, fruit juice (makes it easier to pour and drink) and honey (I also add frozen berries from Pick n Pay or Woolies) to make a delicious fruit smoothie for school and serve in a sealed juice container that can be shaken up before drinking.

- Instead of packets of chips, pack bread sticks, rice cakes, savoury biscuits, a container of mixed seeds/nuts/dried fruits, and a bundle of veggie sticks.
- Home-made muffins. Make them on the weekend with your children and use sparingly as lunchbox treats. Muffins can be frozen.
- Jungle Energy Bars - various flavours and great for kids doing sport.
- Popcorn.
- SAFARI Dried fruit rolls, Fruit BITES (fruit flakes).
- SAFARI Unsalted peanuts and raisins.
- SAFARI Fruit breakfast bar.
- Pistachio Nuts, Macadamia nuts, ANY NUTS.
- Meatballs - Chicken, mince or lentil.
- Cheese cubes.
- Hard boiled eggs.
- Small container of yoghurt with muesli sprinkled on top.
- Muffin with cheese, cottage cheese or jam.
- Whole-wheat scone with cheese or jam.
- Slices of fruit loaf.
- Raw vegetables with a low fat dip/favourite dressing/mayonnaise (cherry tomatoes, cucumber sticks, carrot sticks).
- Pretzels.
- Cottage cheese topped with toasted walnuts or pumpkin seeds.
- Hummus and crackers: you can add finely-chopped bell pepper or sunflower seeds for extra nutrition.

A SPECIAL LUNCH BOX

We are lucky these days to have the most amazing lunch boxes. Most of them have gel packs that can be placed in the fridge/freezer over night and will keep your food cold the following day. Go to your local plastic shop and look around.

ENJOY AND GOOD LUCK!

I hope this list of healthy lunch box ideas has given you some inspiration. Even if you try just a couple of new things each week, your kids' packed lunches will be that much more interesting, and you'll be giving them some great healthy eating habits. Each month we will add a few more items that we find on the shelves while shopping. Enjoy and good luck!