

## Secrets to Making School Lunches Kids Won't Want to Trade

Making easy, yet healthy, lunches that your child won't want to trade with friends in the lunch room can be as difficult as your young scholar's long division homework.

Creating an appealing, healthy lunch is not a new challenge, and today's pre-packaged lunches and cafeteria "treats" can be temptations that many students find hard to avoid. To help your kids refuel at school, here are several ideas for packing a healthy lunch:

**Keep it interesting.** Pack a small quantity of several foods in a bento-type lunch box to keep things interesting. Bento boxes are a great way to offer healthy foods in a fun and attractive way. Have your child help cut sandwiches with cookie cutters into different shapes. Add colorful fruits and vegetables in different sizes and pack yummy dips such as fat-free or low-fat yogurt or hummus.

**Pick a theme.** Trigger your children's creative juices by suggesting themes, such as:

- **The Dip:** Cut a baked chicken breast into strips, and pack them with honey mustard for dipping. Include carrots and broccoli to dip in fat-free or reduced-fat ranch dressing.
- **Backwards:** Make an inside-out sandwich using lettuce to wrap turkey, fat-free or low-fat cheese, and tomato.
- **Mexican Food Mondays:** Set out whole-wheat tortillas, lettuce, fat-free or low-fat sour-cream, salsa, brown rice, and beans that aren't refried, and have them build healthy burritos or tacos!

**Forget the white bread.** Banish boredom by using whole-grain pitas, tortillas, or rolls for sandwiches.

Switch out the fillers, too. For example:

- If your child loves PB&J, make a peanut butter and banana roll-up. Spread peanut butter on a whole-grain tortilla, add a sliced banana, and roll!
- Fill a pita with your child's favorite vegetables, adding hummus for flavor.
- Spread some pizza sauce on a whole wheat tortilla, add some low-fat or fat-free mozzarella cheese, then melt, roll, and slice.



**Mix up the sides.** Go beyond pretzels!

- Dip apple slices in nut/seed butter.
- Pack snap peas, sliced bell peppers, or cucumbers for color and crunch!
- Add some variety with air-popped, low-fat popcorn.

Don't forget that juice and sodas can be high in sugar and calories. Replace them with water or fat-free or low-fat milk.

For more healthy lunch ideas and tips for creating a healthy shopping list, visit **We Can!** (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition)® at <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov>. Developed by the National Institutes of Health, **We Can!** provides parents, caregivers, and communities with free tips, tools, and guidance to help children ages 8–13 maintain a healthy weight by improving food choices, increasing physical activity, and reducing screen time.

So, before you roll up your shirtsleeves and call on your young helpers, arm yourself with these and other ideas for making a healthy lunch that your children will look forward to all morning.