

Tips for a healthy lunchbox

Read our tips on making successful sandwiches, adding something a bit different to lunchboxes and choosing healthier options.

Making sandwiches



Try to keep a selection of breads in the freezer for sandwiches. Then you can just take out what you need for one day's lunchbox and defrost it on a plate or in the microwave.

Using a different type of bread each day can make lunchboxes more interesting. Try granary, wholemeal and raisin bread, multi-grain and seed rolls, mini wholemeal baguettes, bagels and wholemeal pitta.

If your child refuses to eat brown bread at first, try buying 'whole white' sliced bread (white bread made with one-third wholemeal flour). Or you could make a sandwich from one slice of whole white bread and one slice of wholemeal/brown bread.

- Always try to add a little salad to a sandwich.
- To avoid soggy sandwiches, make sure that you dry salad with kitchen paper or a salad spinner before you add it to the sandwich. Or you could put cucumber sticks and cherry tomatoes in a separate sandwich bag.
- Try to use less butter or margarine and avoid mayonnaise if you can, or use lower-fat versions.
- Pick low-fat sandwich fillings, such as lean meats, including ham or turkey, fish (such as tuna or salmon), cottage cheese, Edam, mozzarella, or sliced banana.

Something different



- In the summer, salads are light and refreshing and full of essential vitamins and minerals. Try to include a variety of different salad vegetables - for example radish, grated carrot, spinach, tomato and spring onion. You could also sprinkle an assortment of seeds over the salad (sunflower, pumpkin, sesame and pine nuts) or dried fruit such as sultanas, raisins or chopped apricots.
- Make a rice salad using cooked brown rice and lentils - you could add chunks of cooked aubergine, pepper slices, chopped spring onions and pieces of cooked turkey or chicken. Pasta salads are also a good option. Try mixing cooked pasta with tuna and avocado, or chicken, sweetcorn, cherry tomato and spinach leaves.
- Home-made pizza is also a great choice. Why not make a pizza together for an evening meal and save some for the next day's lunchbox? On the pizza base, put a tomato and basil sauce/paste, mozzarella cheese and plenty of chopped vegetables - peppers, onion, mushrooms and sliced courgettes. You could also make a mini pizza using a wholemeal muffin cut in half and topped with vegetables or ham. Toast this under a grill for a couple of minutes for a fun and different snack.

- Try adding a slice of home-made Spanish omelette with potato, courgette and tomato, or broccoli and tomato quiche. You could also have these for an evening meal and then save a bit for the next day. If you make your own quiche, don't add salt. If you buy quiche, try to choose options that are lower in salt and fat.
- Don't forget to add some vegetables to your child's lunchbox, such as cherry tomatoes, or sticks of carrot, cucumber, celery and peppers. Raw sugar snap peas are also a good choice because they are naturally sweet and crunchy.

Healthier alternatives to sweets



Fruit salad makes a great dessert. You could make an exotic version with blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and grapes, or a more traditional version with apples, bananas, grapes and oranges. This will count towards your child's five daily portions of fruit and veg.

- Try adding a handful of dried fruit, such as raisins, apricots, figs or prunes - these can also count as a portion of fruit and veg and this is a way to encourage your child to try new foods.

- Try different desserts, such as stewed fruit (without added sugar). You could add a spoonful or two of natural yoghurt to the fruit, or sprinkle some rolled oats and seeds on the top for extra crunch.
- Instead of cakes, chocolates and biscuits, try scones, currant buns (without icing) and fruit bread.
- Make sure that your child gets enough calcium by adding a slice of cheese, yoghurt (preferably sugar-free or low in sugar) or rice pudding, choosing low-fat versions where possible.

Drinks



Always include a drink to go to keep your child hydrated and help them concentrate. Go for still/sparkling water, semi-skimmed or skimmed milk, or unsweetened fruit juice.

Add a fruit smoothie made from natural yoghurt, mixed berries and maybe a dash of honey, or maybe a home-made milkshake (try mixing semi-skimmed milk with puréed strawberries or raspberries).

Reducing salt, fat and sugar



When you're choosing foods for your child's lunchbox, always try to watch out for the levels of salt, fat and sugar. If you're buying foods, you can find out how much salt, fat and sugar they contain by looking at the label.

Reducing salt

- Always check food labels for the salt or sodium content. If sodium is listed and you want to convert this to salt, you multiply the sodium figure by 2.5.
- A product is high in salt if it contains 1.5g or more of salt per 100g or 0.6g or more of sodium per 100g. A product is low in salt if it contains 0.3g or less of salt per 100g or 0.1g or less of sodium.
- Cut down on foods that are often high in salt, such as processed meat, cheese, and smoked fish.
- If you make your own foods (e.g. pasta, quiche, and bread) for your child's lunchbox, try to use less salt or leave it out altogether.
- When making sandwiches, go easy with sauces and pickles because these are usually very high in salt.

Reducing fat

- Always check the food label for fat content. As a guide, a food is high in fat if it contains 20g or more of fat per 100g and is low in fat if it contains 3g or less per 100g. A food is high in saturated fat (also known as saturates) if it contains 5g or more per 100g and is low in saturated fat if it contains 1.5g or less per 100g.
- Use butter, margarine, mayonnaise or salad dressings sparingly, because these can be high in fat, or choose low-fat spreads instead.
- Use full-fat cheese or cheese spreads sparingly.
- Watch out for meat pies, pasties, fried foods and salami, because these tend to be high in fat.
- Choose lean cuts of meat and take the skin off chicken.

Reducing sugar

- Always read the label of any food you are buying for your child's lunchbox. Some foods can contain sugar that you might not expect to contain it.
- A product is high in sugar if it contains 15g or more of sugar per 100g. A product is low in sugar if it contains 5g or less per 100g.
- Watch out on the ingredients list for other words used to describe sugar, such as sucrose, glucose (syrup), fructose, hydrolysed starch and invert sugar. The higher up the ingredients list they come, the higher in sugar the foods are.
- For drinks, go for still/sparkling water, semi-skimmed or skimmed milk, unsweetened fruit juice and/or smoothies or yoghurt drinks, rather than squashes and sweet fizzy drinks.
- Instead of sweets and chocolate, give your child fresh or dried fruit to snack on. Alternatively, you could try sunflower and pumpkin seeds or vegetable sticks and cherry tomatoes.

- If you bake at home for your child's lunchbox, cut down on the sugar that you add. Try using fresh strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, apricots, raisins or fruit purées to add sweetness.