

Healthy packed lunches

Packed lunches don't have to be boring. With a little thought and imagination they can be fun, healthy and tasty too.

Just include something from each of the four main food groups – starchy carbohydrates (bread, rice, potatoes, pasta), fruit and vegetables, protein containing foods (meat, fish, eggs and beans), and milk and dairy foods – pop in a drink and away you go!

Start with the basics – bread, cereals and potatoes.

Starchy carbohydrates are a really important part of a healthy diet and should make up about a third of the food we eat. They are packed full of nutrients (including B vitamins, iron and fibre) and you should include a little at each meal to keep your energy levels up during the day:

- Try to keep a selection of breads in the freezer for sandwiches and choose wholegrain varieties when you can. Using a different type of bread each day can make sandwiches more interesting. Try multigrain and seed rolls, bagels, bread rolls, baguettes, pitta breads, wraps, crackers or oat cakes..... the list is endless.
- Raid the fridge for leftovers.
- Alternatively, cook extra pasta, couscous, rice or potatoes and mix it with cut-up vegetables, a few nuts or tuna, then just add your favourite low-calorie dressing.

Add a tasty filling - meat, fish and alternatives

Try to include lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs, nuts, beans or pulses in your lunchbox because they are a great source of protein which is needed for the growth and repair of your body. Try:

- tuna with cucumber, green pepper, sweetcorn or tomato
- choose oily fish such as tinned sardines or mackerel on toast once or twice a week. A great source of omega-3 which may help to keep your heart healthy
- egg mayonnaise and cucumber



- cottage cheese and dried apricots
- cooked chicken or turkey, mustard, tomatoes and lettuce
- peanut butter and banana
- chicken breast, cheese and tomato
- for beans and pulses try lentil soup, houmous with red pepper or a mixed bean salad

Remember if you are using a spread to choose a reduced fat one - or do without it completely if you are using a moist filling.

Feeling fruity?

It's important to eat five (or more) portions of fruit and vegetables every day to prevent heart disease and reduce the risk of some types of cancer. Below are some good ideas to get plenty at lunchtime:

- sliced salad vegetables in sandwiches – such as cucumber, tomato or avocado
- chopped raw vegetable crudités e.g. carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, or a mixed salad. These can be great for dipping in houmous, low-fat cream cheese or cottage cheese
- fresh fruit e.g. apple, grapes, banana, kiwi fruit
- dried fruits e.g. raisins, apricots tinned fruit in natural juice – the cheapest option is to decant into a small container, alternatively buy in small tins with a ring pull





Dairy delights

Try to include some dairy products in your lunchbox as calcium is important to keep your teeth healthy and your bones strong:

- low fat yoghurt – plain or fruit
- low fat fromage frais
- small pot of rice pudding
- glass of milk – plain or flavoured

Remember, cheese in a sandwich will also count.

Added extras

Fancy something extra in your lunchbox?

There's nothing wrong with this. Just try and make healthier choices when you can, such as:

- a currant bun, scone or fruit loaf
- reduced fat crisps
- plain popcorn
- a plain biscuit e.g. digestive, rich tea or oatmeal varieties
- sugar-free jelly pots or fruit jelly

And finally, if you haven't already done so – put in a drink

It is important to stay hydrated during the day – current recommendations are for women to drink 1.6 litres and men 2 litres of water (or other fluids) per day (equivalent to 8-10 glasses). When the weather is warm or if you are more active you may need more. Avoid soft and fizzy drinks that are high in added sugars, instead choose from:

- plain water (still or sparkling)
- plain milk (skimmed or semi-skimmed) or plain yoghurt combined with fruit e.g. smoothies, pureed fruit with plain yoghurt
- pure fruit juice in small cartons (150ml) or in a small bottle which will also count towards one of your five-a-day (but it will only ever count as one portion no matter how much you drink)
- low calorie squash or diet drinks - small cans are now available
- and don't forget a flask for hot drinks or soup in the winter

Remember to keep your lunch cool and safe

- use a cool bag an ice-pack or freeze a carton of juice and place in with food to keep cool
- keep in the fridge until morning if you make it the night before
- don't store your lunch next to a radiator or in direct sunlight.

Summary

As you can see there are lots of foods that can be used to make a packed lunch varied and tasty. Just remember to include something from each of the four main food groups, as well as a drink, and you'll not only have a meal to look forward to but a lunchbox packed full of all the right nutrients to fuel your body for the rest of the day.

Further information: Food Fact Sheets on other topics including Healthy Eating and Fruit and Veg - how to get 5-a-day are available at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts