

## Packed Lunch

Lunch is an important meal for children to provide energy and nutrients to keep them going throughout the afternoon. A packed lunch made at home can be a healthy and delicious choice and gives you control over the foods and ingredients included.

The key to a healthy packed lunch is variety and getting the right balance of foods to provide children with all of the nutrients they need to stay healthy.

### What makes a healthy, balanced packed lunch for children?

Below are some guidelines on how to put together a healthy, balanced packed lunch – these follow the principles of the UK healthy eating model, the [Eatwell Guide](#):

A school packed lunch should:

#### Be based on starchy foods

- This can include rice, pasta, bread, couscous, wraps, pitta, potatoes and chapatti and where possible try to choose wholegrain varieties, e.g. wholemeal bread and leave skins on potatoes.

#### Include plenty of fruit and vegetables

- Include 1-2 portions in your child's lunch box and try to vary these throughout the week.
- You could add sliced vegetables into a pasta dish or sandwich.
- Supermarkets often have packs of chopped fresh fruits or individual packs of dried fruits. Keep some of these in the cupboard for those days when you don't have much time to prepare.

**Top tip:** Make your own individual bags of dried fruit - place a small handful of mixed dried fruits, into food bags or sealed containers to store in the cupboard, this will also keep the costs down!

#### Include a portion of beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat, a dairy food and/or a non-dairy source of protein

- Use beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other sources of protein as sandwich fillings or in a pasta or rice salad.
- If you're not including a dairy food in the main lunch item (e.g. in a salad or sandwich), add in a yogurt or some cheese such as a cheddar stick or cheese string to the lunch box.
- If you're including a dairy alternative, e.g. soya yogurt or milk, choose varieties which are unsweetened and fortified with calcium.

**Top tip:** Schools may not have fridge space available for children's packed lunches, so to keep your child packed lunch cool, freeze a drink to act as a cool pack and it will melt back in time for lunch!

## Packed lunch ideas

Below are some tasty ideas of what you could include in your child's packed lunch.

## **A sandwich, bagel, wrap, chapati or pitta**

Filling ideas:

- Salmon pâté with salad leaves, chopped tomato and cucumber

To make the pâté: mix a can of tinned salmon with two tablespoons of low fat Greek yogurt two teaspoons of lemon juice .

- Falafel, grated carrot, lettuce leaves, reduced fat hummus or tzatziki
- Left over spiced chicken, red onion, spinach and low fat riatá

**Top tip:** 'mix and match' sandwiches – If you have a few mouths to feed, you could make a few different flavours, divide into two or three and put one of each flavour in each lunchbox

## **A pasta salad**

These recipes could also work with rice or couscous or quinoa.

- Canned tuna, can of mixed beans, grated carrot
- Left over roasted Mediterranean vegetables topped with cottage or soft cheese

**Top tip:** If you're making pasta for dinner, cook a little extra and keep aside for lunchboxes

## **Homemade mini pizza**

These are really simple and delicious and you can get children involved too.

To make the mini pizza: Spread some tomato purée and fresh or dried herbs onto a pitta bread and top with vegetables such as onion, sweetcorn, peppers, courgettes, spinach or rocket, some cooked chicken and some grated cheese or slices of mozzarella. Grill until the cheese is melted. Cool and place in the lunchbox in the fridge for the next day.

## **Easy frittatas**

Frittatas are a great lunchbox item that can be enjoyed by all of the family. You can add any vegetables, beans, pulses, meats and cheese that you like and it is a great way to use up any leftovers. You could try:

- sweet potato, chickpea and spinach
- pea, mint and courgette
- canned salmon, rocket and mozzarella

## **Don't forget to also include...**

- a drink
- a dairy food (if not already included in the main meal)
- an extra fruit or vegetable