

PERFECT PACKED LUNCHES



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A PACKED LUNCH?

Making your own lunches is the only way you can be sure you know what's going in them. You can tailor them to suit your tastes and choose good-quality ingredients to make them even more nutritious. Shop-bought sandwiches and snacks are often packed with additives and can also be loaded with mayonnaise, sauces or dressings which are high in fat and salt.

If you always take a packed lunch to school, try to mix things up a bit so you aren't eating the same old thing every day. Keep the ingredients fresh, the flavours exciting, and make different options throughout the week to keep things interesting. You can even use up the leftovers from your evening meals in your lunches, which will save you time and money. If you're stuck for new ideas, use the list below for some inspiration.

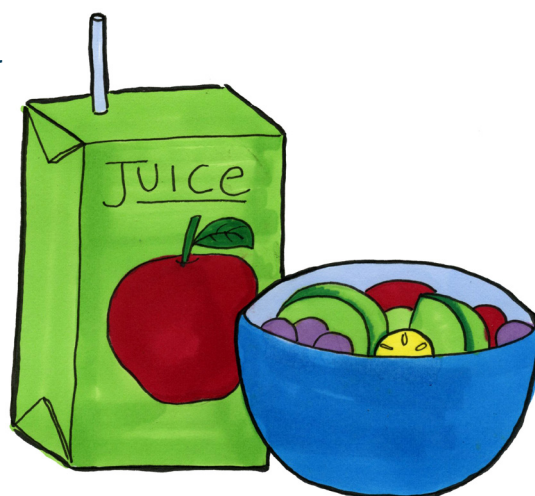
WHAT SORTS OF FOOD SHOULD YOU PACK?

For a well-balanced meal that will keep you going all day, aim for a good mix of protein and carbohydrates with plenty of fruit and vegetables.

Protein: This is found in a variety of foods so it should be easy to make it part of your lunchtime meal. Eggs, cheese, fish and meat are great in salads, and also make good sandwich fillers. Foods like beans, peas, pulses and lentils are also excellent sources of protein, not to mention equally delicious in any number of cold salads.

Carbohydrates: Bread is the easiest way to get carbohydrates into your lunch. As well as being an excellent source of carbs, bread also provides you with B vitamins, protein, calcium and fibre. There are loads of different speciality breads, so try a few to find your favourites – pick from naan bread, ciabatta, tortilla wraps, focaccia, bagels, pitta breads, baguettes, seeded breads, fruit breads, crusty rolls and many more.

Fruit and veg: Try to get at least one or two of your 5 a day (see *Getting your 5 a Day*) into your packed lunch. Try any of these simple options: a handful of grapes or fresh berries, a piece of fresh fruit, a medium-sized banana, apple or pear or even a glass of 100% unsweetened fruit juice or heaped tablespoon of dried fruit. Add 4 tablespoons of spinach leaves or lettuce to your sandwich or slice cucumber, peppers or carrots into sticks and have them as a snack.





SOME GREAT LUNCHBOX IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

Savoury: A flask of home-made soup with a hunk of nice bread and a small wedge of tasty cheese; slices of home-made pizza, quiche or frittata; or pittas stuffed with mini home-made kebabs. Salads with a great dressing can also make brilliant lunches. You can use everything from seasonal vegetables and salad leaves to pasta, couscous, lentils or potatoes mixed with different cheeses or meats. By adding toasted nuts, seeds or dried fruit, you can get a really exciting contrast of textures and flavours. It's a good idea to take the dressing in a separate pot so you can toss it through the salad right before eating. That way everything will be crunchy and lovely rather than soggy.

Sweet: A fresh fruit salad; a tablespoon of dried fruit; stewed fruit and natural yoghurt; a slice of fruit bread; fresh fruit skewers; oaty biscuits; home-made flapjacks or granola bars packed with lots of lovely nuts and seeds.

Drinks: Home-made fruit smoothies; water with a wedge of fresh lemon or lime; milk; or freshly squeezed fruit juice mixed with sparkling water. Or, you could try popping a carton of 100% unsweetened fruit juice in the freezer overnight. Pack it in your lunchbox first thing and by lunchtime you'll have a lovely slushy cold drink.

Always check the label of any ready-made ingredients you're using for your lunch for any hidden artificial colours or flavours. Avoid processed sandwich fillings, such as reformed meat or processed cheese.

LUNCHBOX & MEAL PLANNER

The NHS has a great website to help you plan out balanced meals for a week.

Check out: <http://www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/5aday.aspx?tag> for lots of great recipe suggestions. The site also tells you how many of your 5 a day you're getting and will even create a shopping list for you!