



HEALTHY SCHOOL LUNCHES

Your Child Will Actually Eat!

By Bonnie Dean

There's the old adage, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." By the same token, you can send your children to school with a healthy and nutritious lunch, but can you make them eat it? Lunches and snacks provide the energy and nutrients to help kids get through the school day, as well as aid in their growth and development. Teeth and gums need a wide range of essential vitamins and minerals for growth, development and good health, just like your child's body. If you get your children involved with preparing their own lunches, they may be more likely to eat them.

Here are a few ideas for what to pack in your child's lunch box:

Fruits and vegetables

Citrus fruits and kiwi fruit are good sources of vitamin C – important for healthy gums. Celery, carrots and dried apricots contain beta carotene, which helps your body create vitamin A – a nutrient essential for building strong teeth.

Lunch/snack ideas:

- Sliced peppers, celery or carrots for dipping into yogurt or hummus, or enjoying on their own
- Grape tomatoes and sliced cucumbers drizzled with low-fat salad dressing
- Non-salted tortilla chips with salsa and guacamole
- A tropical fruit cup, with mangoes, kiwi and oranges
- A fruit smoothie, prepared with low-fat plain yogurt (with no added sugar) and honey, can pack a good nutritional punch without additional fat.

Dairy

Cheese, yogurt and milk all contain calcium, which helps strengthen tooth enamel. Cheese also stimulates saliva production, which helps clear away food particles from your teeth.

Lunch/snack ideas:

- Low-fat yogurt (with no added sugar) on its own or for dipping veggies
- Cheese slices on whole-wheat crackers
- A milk-based pudding
- Cheese-filled pasta with tomato sauce.

Protein

Protein-rich foods like meat, poultry and fish are good sources of phosphorous, which is needed for tooth development and is instrumental in helping your body balance and absorb calcium and magnesium. Beans, grains and nuts are also rich in protein, magnesium, calcium and phosphorous.



Lunch/snack ideas:

- Tuna on whole-wheat bread or pita with lettuce and cucumber slices
- Small whole-wheat or corn tortillas with baked or refried beans, salsa and shredded cheese
- Whole-wheat pita slices and veggie sticks with hummus
- Slices of turkey or ham with mustard, lettuce and tomatoes in a wrap
- Chicken salad flavoured with curry, onions, light mayo, pickles, apples or dill
- Nut-free trail mix.

The last word

Soda, sports drinks and sweetened fruit juices often contribute to tooth decay because of the high sugar and acid content. Opt for water, milk or 100 per cent pure fruit juices, instead.

It can be difficult to get your children to eat more healthy fare. All it takes is a little patience, knowledge and creativity to establish good eating habits, which can lead your children on the right path to good oral and overall health. 

Get Them Involved

Take your children grocery shopping and let them choose some of their favourite foods.

Guide your children into making good choices by giving them healthy options to pick from – breads, vegetables, fruit and yogurts.

A child's taste may change from one day to the next. Try new foods regularly, and keep kids interested with lunches that include a variety of shapes and colours.

Get your kids to pack their own lunches – older children can help make sandwiches, while younger children can place snacks into containers.

Original source: EatRight Ontario (now [UnlockFood.ca](https://www.unlockfood.ca))