

Healthy Lunch Boxes for Children

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Healthy lunches and snacks are important for children and help with concentration and learning.

Healthy eating changes are not always easy to make.

Try to set a good example with your lunches. Encourage children to be involved with their own lunch preparation and their choices about foods to include. Praise your child when they choose well.

There are limited times for children to eat during the day, especially at school. Children may prefer to play with friends rather than eating. Encourage your child to sit and eat before heading out to play, at Glendal Primary School all children have the opportunity to eat inside prior to going out to play.

Six items to put in a lunch box

1. Fresh fruit
2. Crunchy vegetables
3. A dairy food- cheese, milk or yoghurt
4. Protein food- slice of lean meat,
5. Starchy food , bread, roll, flat bread, fruit bread or dry biscuits, rice or pasta
6. Water.

Food Suggestions

There are many food choices to put in a lunch box. There are many food s which are healthy choices.

Fruit

Best choices

Fresh or tinned fruit, dried fruit is sticky and high in sugar. Dried fruit is best eaten as a snack or part of a meal. Put a sticker on a piece of fruit as a surprise for your child!

Best left out

Dried fruit bars and “straps” are very high in sugar, low in fibre and stick to children’s teeth causing tooth decay.

Vegetables

Best choices

Try vegetable sticks with dips or a small container with mixed vegetables such as cherry tomatoes, capsicum, carrot sticks, beans and cucumber.

Best left out

Packets of chips are best left for parties and as occasional food.

Dairy

Best choices

Cheese slices, cubes or sticks.

Yoghurt- natural or fruit yoghurt ,try freezing a tub of yoghurt and putting it in your lunch box. By lunch time it will be partially thawed and ready to eat.

Milk.

Best left out

“Dairy desserts” and flavoured milks are high in sugar,

Starchy food

Sandwiches

Include a variety of bread and fillings, especially if children begin to lose interest in sandwiches.

Best choices

Choose one or more of the following:

- salmon or tuna in spring water, try the mini cans of tuna with added flavours
- cheese
- egg
- falafel or lentil patties
- sliced lean, cold meats, ham, turkey, chicken, lamb, beef or meatballs
- baked beans or bean salad
- vegemite
- grated carrot, lettuce and tomato

Include bread or rolls, flat bread, fruit loaf, buns, bagels, croissant, corn or rice cakes, Turkish bread, crisp bread or pikelets.

Alternatives to sandwiches

- pasta: make a salad with lots of raw vegetables
- rice: when making fried rice minimise oil and add lots of steamed vegetables

Best left out

Avoid chocolate spreads, peanut butter, jams and honey. Avoid fatty meats such as salami and Strasbourg.

Biscuits and dips

Best choices

Dry biscuit, crisp breads, rice cakes with yoghurt, vegetable or hummus dips

Best left out

“Oven baked” savoury biscuits are just as high in salt and fat as crisps

Muffins and Cakes

Best choices

Try making your own healthy muffins and cakes. Include fruit and vegetables such as sultanas, carrot, zucchini, banana and pumpkin.

Best left out

Offer donuts and cakes at birthdays and special occasions instead of lunch boxes.

Muesli and “breakfast bars”

Almost all “bars” are too high in sugar, however some cereal bars are better for teeth than chewy, sticky muesli type bars.

Best left out

Try to avoid chocolate bars and muesli bars in lunch boxes. These are expensive and stuck together with fats and sugars.

Best Drinks

Water and milk are the best drinks for children. They can be frozen to help keep foods in the lunch box cool.

Best left out

All sweet drinks such as: fruit juices, juice drinks, cordial, sports drinks, flavoured mineral waters and soft drinks are high in sugar and not necessary. These drinks can increase the risk of tooth decay, are filling and may take the place of healthier foods.

Practicalities for busy families

Foods should be simple and easy to prepare, ready to eat and appetising after several hours in the lunch box!

Foods such as sandwiches can be prepared the night before or on the weekend, frozen then taken out for each day's lunch box. Suitable foods to freeze are: bread, cooked meat, cheese, baked beans or vegemite.

Food Safety

In most cases food is stored in lunch boxes for several hours, so the lunch box needs to be kept cool.

- Choose an insulated lunch box or one with a freezer pack, or include a wrapped frozen water bottle to keep the lunch box cool. Two smaller boxes may be more convenient than a single large one.
- Perishable foods such as dairy products, eggs, and sliced meat should be kept cool and eaten within four hours of preparation. Don't pack these foods if just cooked, first cool in the refrigerator overnight.
- **If you include left over meals such as meats, pasta, and rice dishes ensure that you pack you a frozen ice block into the lunch box.**

Lunch Box Tips

Include:

- **fresh fruit**
- **crunchy vegetables**
- **dairy food**, cheese milk or yoghurt
- **protein food**, slice of lean meat,
- **starchy foods**, bread, rice or pasta
- **water**

Best left out:

- **muesli and chocolate bars**

- **potato crisps and oven baked savoury biscuits**
- **sweet drinks**
- **donuts and cakes**
- **lollies, honey and jam**
- **fatty meats such as salami and Strasbourg**

For more information about child nutrition visit:

www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au

For more information about food safety at home visit:

[www.health.vic.gov.au /foodsafety](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety)

This information has been adapted from:

Go for your Life brochures

Woolworths February Brochure (free from you local supermarket)

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