



Canadian Health Network

Health info for every body

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How do I make a 'cool' lunch that my child will eat?

A healthy lunch can be totally 'cool' with a little help from your children! Kids usually know what they like to eat, and what's cool to eat at school. Together, with your knowledge of what makes a lunch healthy and the tips below, the two of you can create totally cool lunches.

- **Set the parameters for a healthy lunch:** Aim to include one food from each of the 4 food groups of [Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating](#). Be sure you have foods your children like, from all the food groups, in your cupboard and fridge. Consult the "Cool Lunch Guide" at the end of this FAQ for ideas. From time to time, you might have to compromise. For example, if your child would like a hot dog, suggest that he/she try it on a whole-wheat tortilla shell or bun; if your child wants a chocolate bar for dessert, include a 'bite size' chocolate bar, instead of a full size bar - it'll satisfy the craving, without adding too many excess, empty calories.
- **Invite your child into the kitchen to become the lunch-making chef:** Some children have never made lunch and may be thrilled to have the chance. You could offer to clean up if you like!
- **Get the creative juices going:** Who says you can't eat green olives in egg salad or granola on peanut butter? If it's an item or a combination your child will actually eat, and it's within reason nutritionally, give it a try. Or have your child pick one food from each of the columns of the "Cool Lunch Guide", and come up with a way to prepare them to make them interesting. You can also create your own "[Cool Lunch Guide](#)".

For example:

- Try a cheese bagel topped with sliced ham, mustard and pickles, to make a new twist on ham and cheese.
 - Stuff pita bread with cut fresh vegetables and sliced luncheon meats, and pack some salad dressing on the side.
 - Make a 'mock' pizza by packing an English muffin, tomato sauce with added pepperoni, shredded cheese and favorite cut vegetables.
 - Make your own fun and easy lunch by packing sliced meat and/or cheese, and crackers in a reusable container.
 - Finish the lunch off with 100% fruit juice, or fruit with yogurt, for a healthy 'cool' lunch.
- **Go on a local food tour for inspiration:** Check out the local farmers' market, visit an ethnic food store or have your child start their own garden - try growing some of the basics, and experiment with some less common foods as well.
 - **Help organize a contest at school for the coolest lunch:** Set the rules for the type/amount of food to include, and then let the kids use their imaginations! Share the ideas with students and parents.

Cool lunches happen when kids get to plan and make the foods they love to eat. Having children take ownership of preparing lunches is a recipe for success!

"Cool Lunch Guide"

Starting with the grain	On top, in between, or on the side	Crunch!	Thirst Quenchers	Kid pleasing additions
Bagel Pita bread Hamburger/ Hot dog bun Bread Flatbread/ tortilla Pasta/ noodles Rice English muffin Muffins Crackers Breadsticks	Cheese (shredded, cubed, sliced) Cream cheese Cottage cheese Luncheon meat *Peanut butter Hard boiled egg Leftover chicken or turkey Canned fish (tuna, salmon...) Tofu Hummus Canned beans	Carrots Celery Lettuce Peppers Cucumber Apple Pear Strawberries Oranges Bananas Broccoli Cauliflower Sunflower and sesame seeds *Peanuts Nuts Salsa Pickles	Milk, white or chocolate milk 100% fruit juice Vegetable juice or cocktail Yogurt and fruit shakes Water	Yogurt - for eating or dipping fruit or vegetables Cereal bar Pudding Canned fruit Snack size chocolate bar Squares (date, rice cereal...) Raisins Mini-cupcakes Cookies (oatmeal, raisin...)

***Because of allergy concerns, check with your school if peanut products are allowed and beware of sharing peanut products**

Resources for Consumers

Dietitians of Canada National Nutrition Month 2004 Factsheets

[Eat Well, Play Well: At Home!](#)

[Eat Well, Play Well: At School!](#)

[Let's Make a Meal!](#)

Have fun making food choices for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks, and see how your food choices score against the recommendations of "Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating". Provides tips on menu planning, nutrition and shopping, as well as recipes, menu-planning guide and pantry suggestions.

[Mission Nutrition*](#)

An educational program that offers fun, interactive learning activities that can be used in the classroom and at home to get children [5-14 yr] excited about healthy living.

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Resources for health intermediaries

Eating, Physical Activity and Body Weight Trends in Canadian Children and Youth

[2004 Nutrition Month® Backgrounder for Dietitians, Educators, Parents and Community Leaders](#)

[Canadian Living Foundation, Breakfast for Learning](#)

Supports community action on child hunger by assisting in the development of breakfast, lunch and snack programs in schools and communities. Provides funding directly to communities that want to start or expand child nutrition programs.

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