

Healthy Brown Bag Lunches

One of the best ways to improve your diet is to stop eating out when you're at work or school. This can be applied to your entire family. While some may complain at first about the changes in the food, over time they may come to appreciate the flavors that healthy foods offer.

The most important part is to choose nutritious foods to go into the brown bag or lunch box. In other words, no chips, no cupcakes, no candy, no soda. With a bit of work, you can find foods that everyone will enjoy so that the kids are less likely to trade away their healthy lunches.

Here are some of the basics to a good brown bag lunch. Choose three or more, and remember that some may need to be kept in a refrigerator or have an ice pack included to keep things cold until lunch:

- * Use a whole grain bread, tortilla, pasta, etc. as a part of the lunch. Whole grains are much better for you, and even kids will quickly learn to love them. In my opinion, they have much more flavor, as well as more interesting flavors.
- * Dairy product, such as milk, cheese or yogurt. These, of course, typically need to be kept cold.
- * Meat or other source of protein. This can include fish, eggs, nuts and other products.
- * Vegetables. A salad is a popular choice, as are carrot sticks, cucumber, celery or bell peppers.
- * Fruits. These are popular to use to replace the standard junk food desserts. Kids love apples and bananas, which are pretty much available year round, or a fruit salad is another good choice.

Talk to everyone about what they would like to see in their lunches. It may be a battle to get everyone to quit asking for unhealthy options, but you can get there. You may want to make a list of all the options and have everyone mark off their favorites, so that you know what each person is likely to really eat.

One of the problems with lunches is that they can get boring quickly. Who wants to eat the same old sandwich every day?

A solution to this problem is to vary things whenever possible. Switch the whole wheat bread for a pita or tortilla. Make pasta or rice. Maybe use crackers sometimes.

Vegetables can be made more interesting by adding a dipping sauce. Kids in particular love to dip their vegetables, but grownups are by no means immune to the temptation.

Throw in some berries whenever they're in season. I'll be the first to admit that many berries are outrageously priced much of the year. I've seen those little things of blueberries for as much as \$4 each in my area. On the other hand, when they were in season I bought a huge container of blueberries for about \$8 at Costco.

Dried fruits are also fun to eat. Banana chips and dried apple are common favorites.

Don't get stuck on just making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches or sandwiches with just one favorite meat. Switch the ingredients around. Add special toppings. You can do more than lettuce and tomato on a sandwich. Just think about all the toppings you see at sandwich shops. You can do it too.

What did you have for dinner last night? Leftovers can make a great lunch.

Bringing lunch to school or work doesn't have to be boring. Just hunt up some good recipes and you're in great shape.

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About the Author

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