



### **Menus & Recipes for Healthy School Lunches**

*Teach Your Children Good Nutrition & Environmentally Sound Choices  
Courtesy of Linda Arpino, MA,RD,CDN*

The school year often starts with fast pace schedules. Eating is sometimes the least thought about part for transition from summer to fall schedules. This year start the year off right. Choose foods that are packed with nutrients, taste great and enhance concentration!

Rather than relying on school lunch purchases that have a budget in mind instead of your child's health, make it your policy to send your child to school with their food brought from home a few times a week from home. Schools fall short in offering fresh fruits and vegetables, which are healthier than eating processed foods. The flavor in school food is often from sugar, salt or fat (such as pizza with high fat cheese, nachos, cheese burgers or refined flour pasta) instead of herbs and spices.

Below are some suggestions to make your child's lunches and snacks more interesting.

1. **Collect healthy recipes that work.** Before you can think about what to put in the lunchbox, why not consult the experts? Collect a bunch of healthy, kid-popular ideas that you can rely on for those busy weekday mornings. When healthy ideas and ingredients are on hand, they're far more likely to land in the lunchbox! Find recipes that use spices and herbs to boost flavor!

Here are some resources:

- ***Eat Fit, Be Fit: Health and Weight Management Solutions***, by Linda Arpino, MA,RD,CDN. This guide will offer you not only chapters on basic nutrition for the entire family but also over 250 popular recipes from America and around the world designed to enhance flavor from natural spices and herbs rather than traditional recipes high sugar, salt and fat versions. Vegan, Lacto-ovo vegetarian and Carnivore(animal protein) recipes included with recommended portions and menus for entrees. **[Buy Eat Fit, Be Fit on Amazon.com.](#)**
- ***Lunch Lessons: Changing the Way We Feed Our Children***, by Ann Cooper (aka The Renegade Lunch Lady) and Lisa M. Holmes. This gem includes great recipes as well as solid information on kids' nutritional needs and suggestions (from personal experience) for improving school lunch programs. **[Buy Lunch Lessons on Amazon.com.](#)**
- ***The Earthbound Cook: 250 Recipes for Delicious Food and a Healthy Planet***, by Myra Goodman. Though this cookbook is not specifically about school lunch recipes, we love it because the author focuses on food that's good for our health and the environment. Of course, a great school lunch can come from any cookbook on your

shelf, and leftovers from a popular dinner can help you reduce food waste and save money and time.

2. **Test some recipes on weekends with your child ahead of time.** Before introducing a new lunch try it at home first. Children always seem to eat more variety when they are involved in not only preparing it but also cooking under your supervision.
3. **Keep portions appropriate for their age.** Mypyramid.gov is a website devoted with helping guide parents on the servings needed per day of food groups. Still not sure, consult a registered dietitian. Choose three food groups per meal, including a fruit or vegetable, protein and whole grain with over 2 grams of fiber. Use more or all plant protein than animal protein for many reasons: it has more phytonutrients to boost the immune system, beans have more fiber and folic acid, tofu has isoflavones, and nut butters, nuts and seeds all have protein and essential fatty acids, all are protective for the heart. It is better for our plants sustainability with less fuel used to produce plant food sources. If you do choose meat or poultry, select ones that say no antibiotics or hormones. Skip processed meats -- sliced lunch meats, chicken nuggets, hot dogs, bologna and bacon(high in nitrates that cause cancer) sausage even though they're easy and cheap. You will save \$ eating plant protein alternatives too!

4. **Best Bet Drinks.** Instead of sugary juice, soda or bottled water, send your child to school with filtered water or organic, fat free or low-fat milk in a stainless steel bottle. You'll use less plastic and save money! It's easy to find kid-size reusable water bottles these days - one recommendation: [Klean Kanteen's stainless steel](#). For tips on filtering your tap water at home (a good idea in most places, depending on your local water quality), check [EWG's Safe Drinking Water Tips pdf](#). /www.ewg.org. At School water is often unfiltered. Getting a filter added is a great green team project.

5. **Reduce lunchtime waste.** School lunches can generate lots of garbage, like any out-of-the-home meal. Go easier on the local landfill by sending lunch and snacks in reusable packaging and skip single-serve items. Some simple steps to limit your waste:

-Find non-toxic, reusable containers, like stainless steel lunch boxes. If you choose plastic containers, pick them carefully (plastics marked with a #1, 2, 4 or 5 don't contain BPA and may be better options. [Check our plastics tips at www.ewg.org](#)) and wash them by hand -- the dishwasher's extreme heat can cause chemicals to leach. Try to avoid soft-sided plastic lunchboxes.

-Send tableware from home.

-Skip the straws -- or go reusable if you must.

-Just say no to juice boxes.

-Get inspired and learn more at [Waste Free Lunches.org](#).

Here are some examples of some parent's healthier school lunches:

Whole Wheat Pita with Homemade Sweet Pea Hummus\*

And shredded carrots

Mini Rice cake with apple butter

Fresh sliced apple with lemon and cinnamon  
Raisins, slivered almonds and bran chex

Almond butter and jam on whole wheat  
Organic cherry tomatoes  
Organic watermelon wedges and blueberries  
Fruit leather -- look for natural brands or make your own

Cheese tortellini with cherry tomatoes  
Salad with mandarin orange or apples and walnuts  
Slice of Whole grain Italian bread

Brown rice and bean chili in a thermos  
Organic sliced carrots  
Tortilla chips and fresh tomato salsa  
Organic Apple slices

Sunflower seed or Peanut butter and jelly on whole wheat  
Fresh Organic Apple  
Organic celery

Tomato soup in a thermos  
Small chicken or turkey wrap or sliced cooked chicken  
Organic cucumber slices with lime and salt  
Organic grapes mixed with carrot slices

Whole Wheat Tortilla with chicken breast and pesto  
Sliced pickles(homemade)  
Banana or grapes

### **Sweet Pea Hummus**

1 package frozen peas  
2 T. Greek Yogurt  
1 teaspoon sesame paste-optional  
1 clove garlic, minced  
1 scallion  
1 teaspoon lemon juice

Puree all ingredients in a food processor. Serve 1/3 cup as a source of protein.

Reference: ACCESSED 8/16/2011

[http://www.ewg.org/healthyhometips/packedlunchtips?utm\\_source=2011packedlunchtipssuba&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=first-link&utm\\_campaign=email](http://www.ewg.org/healthyhometips/packedlunchtips?utm_source=2011packedlunchtipssuba&utm_medium=email&utm_content=first-link&utm_campaign=email)

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**Other Great Tips :** Teach your child to sit relaxed not rushed. This is very important for digestion and hormonal balance and will help with feeling satisfied. A false sense of hunger

from adrenaline and cortisone overdrive may occur from eating on the run. Avoid meals and snacks in cars, watching TV.

- Plan ahead. Encourage your child to NOT skip meals, especially breakfast which is critical for school attention and ability to focus. Late night heavy eating will reduce the desire for food first thing in the morning. So limit bedtime snacks and offer most calories during the day when they are the most active.
- Choose fiber rich, healthy snacks such as fresh fruit or vegetable, low sugar whole grain cereals, fiber rich bread or crackers. Junk foods should be only considered after your child has sufficiently met their nutritional needs. 100 calorie snack packs (cookies or chips) should not replace more nutrient dense options such as apples, pears, bananas, carrots, and other raw vegetables, whole grain bread or crackers or cereal. Manufacturers coined 100 calories as a target, but many children should have less.
- Physical Activity is key to release stress and help maintain muscle.
- Get Sufficient Rest. 8-10 hours a day of sleep is suggested. Lack of rest is often a cause of over eating.

Life Focus Nutrition Centers [www.lifefocusnutrition.com](http://www.lifefocusnutrition.com)