



Back to school time is quickly approaching! What to pack for lunch for kids and for yourself?? Bringing your lunch from home at least some days of the work week can save you money and make a difference in your health! When you pack it yourself, you have more input into the ingredients and how foods have been prepared. It's best not to get into the habit of skipping lunch as we all need to fuel our body mid-day if we want them to perform physically and mentally at their peak!

Use "My Pyramid" (www.mypyramid.gov) as a guide on what to include. Ideally a lunch would cover at least 3 food groups.

Low fat dairy: Nonfat or 1% milk or low-fat yogurt (even a smoothie or drinkable yogurt)
Low fat cheese or cottage cheese

Fruits: Fresh that travels well (such as apple, grapes, orange, banana) or fruit canned in juice

Vegetables: baby carrots, colored pepper strips, broccoli or cauliflower, lettuce and tomatoes for a sandwich, V-8 or tomato juice

Protein sources: Turkey, lean ham or roast beef, peanut or other butter, nuts, tuna, hard-boiled egg, bean soup or chili, leftovers

Grains: Think whole grains! More nutrition and more fiber! WW pita bread, WW bagel or whole grain crackers

Whole wheat tortilla for a wrap!

Leftover brown rice or WW pasta

If a "treat" is a must and fruit just doesn't cut it, consider something very small like a couple of chocolate kisses or a small handful of M&M candies-it shouldn't take much to satisfy the sweet tooth!

Avoid high sugar and high calorie drinks that don't offer nutrition. If milk is not well accepted, consider a low calorie flavored water rather than resorting to a high calorie soda or juice drink.

The trick is trying to interject some creativity so that lunches don't get too routine and boring!

When planning your lunch consider:

- o Texture (crunchy and smooth in same lunch)
- o Flavor (contrast stronger flavors with mild ones)
- o Color (fruits and vegetables are great for introducing color!)
- o Temperature (contrast adds interest but make sure hot foods are hot and cold foods are cold at mealtime)

Think of unique combinations for sandwiches or spreads for crackers or to use inside a pita or wrap such as: peanut butter and raisins, ricotta cheese and toasted walnuts, deviled ham and sweet relish, peanut butter with whole or mashed bananas, homemade hummus with different additions such as pesto, chopped olives or sun-dried tomatoes, chicken or turkey with cranberry sauce and diced celery.

Here some more ideas to add punch to your lunch:

http://busycooks.about.com/od/breakfastrecipes/a/brownbaglunch_2.htm

<http://www.fabulousfoods.com/features/brnbag/brnbag.html>

Here are a few examples of balanced lunches with at least 3 food groups:

1. Whole wheat peanut butter sandwich (sure add a little jelly! Or better yet-try fresh banana on it!), 1 container low fat yogurt, baby carrots
2. Sliced turkey in a WW pita pocket with lettuce and tomato (and other veggies if you choose!), mozzarella cheese stick, piece of fresh fruit
3. Whole Wheat tortilla for wrap with hummus (chickpea spread-very tasty!) with lettuce, cucumbers, sliced peppers, tomato (choose veggies you like!), 1 cup nonfat milk, grapes
4. Pasta Salad made with leftover WW pasta, add veggies you like and either canned chicken, tuna or salmon, use reduced fat dressing of choice, whole grain crackers
5. Green salad (make extra as you make salad for dinner the night before!) with added veggies, protein source such as leftover or canned meat, chicken or fish or hard-boiled egg or reduced fat cheese chunks, reduced fat dressing, whole grain crackers, croutons or bread, piece of fruit

Food safety is always an issue for food prepared ahead and eaten at a later time. Use an ice pack and insulated lunchbox if you don't have access to a refrigerator. If you don't have a gel ice pack you can make an ice pack by cleaning out a plastic margarine tub and filling it with water before freezing it. Once frozen it can be slipped into a zip lock bag to prevent leaking. A thermos is a good way to keep foods at the proper temperature. Clean the thermos daily with boiling water. If refrigeration is not possible, choose less perishable items such as peanut butter or cheese and avoid mayonnaise or salad dressing based items such as tuna or egg salad. Freezing your sandwich or yogurt carton is another option. They will thaw in time for lunch (3 hours) and help to keep the rest of the lunch cool. Here's some additional tips for packing a safe to eat lunch: <http://www.agriculture.state.pa.us/agriculture/cwp/view.asp?a=3&q=126920>

I hope you enjoy your summer weekend- they are quickly disappearing!

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