

From Under the Microscope

Back to School Lunches We Can All Enjoy

Back to school means kids carrying shiny new lunch boxes. It also means stumped moms and dads staring into the fridge, seeking ways to sneak even a little bit of [nutrition](#) into their child's midday meal. An ideal lunch is nutritious and has enough calories to fuel [brain](#) and motor activity but not too many calories, which can cause hyperactive or sluggish post-lunch behavior. It's time to think beyond two slices of bread.

Here are some kid-approved nutritious favorites:

Hole Foods

Top a [cinnamon](#)-raisin bagel with peanut butter and banana. Add a carton of yogurt and a few celery sticks.

Kool Kabobs

Throw in kabobs of any type. Thread low-fat meat, low-fat cheese, pineapple and cherry tomatoes onto a stick. Include whole-grain crackers and a carton of milk.

Try a Tortilla

Spread a low-fat tortilla with egg salad, shredded carrots and cucumber slices. Toss in a yogurt smoothie made with fruit.

Pocket Change

Stuff a pita pocket with fat-free refried beans, shredded cheese, chopped tomatoes, or salsa. Add a carton of milk and fruit.

Layers of Fun

Make your own parfait. In a tall, clear plastic glass. Include low-fat yogurt, fresh fruit and a high-fiber, crunchy cereal and trail mix of raisins, nuts and seeds for a lunchtime treat.

On a Roll

Scoop out a whole-grain roll and fill it with tuna salad made with chopped apples and celery. Add cheese cubes and baby carrots.

It's a Wrap

Place a slice of turkey, Swiss cheese, a few leaves of fresh spinach, and cranberry relish on a colorful wrap -- and then wrap it up! Add a can of tomato juice and a piece of fresh fruit.

Salad Days

Toss in a single-serve bag of ready-to-eat salad with low-fat dressing, cubes of lean meat, cheese, and assorted veggies. Team with whole-grain bread sticks and a carton of low-fat milk.

Pack a Five-Star Lunch:

Balance and variety are the keys to packing a lunch kids will love. A healthy meal consists of an adequate serving of at least three of the following five food groups for balanced [nutrition](#):

Dairy -- string cheese, cheese cubes, low-fat cottage cheese, low-fat yogurt, low-fat milk, pudding made with low-fat milk, [calcium](#)- and [vitamin D](#)-fortified orange juice.

Fruit -- fresh fruit such as orange segments, grapes, strawberries, blueberries, pears, apples, dried fruit, 100% juice boxes, canned fruit cups in juice.

Vegetables -- baby carrots, grape tomatoes, celery sticks, salsa, tomato juice, red bell peppers, broccoli.

Whole Grains -- whole-grain breads, tortillas, wraps, cereals, crackers.

Lean Protein -- beans, nuts, seeds, turkey, chicken, tuna, lean lunch meat, peanut butter, veggie burgers, bean salad, [hummus](#).