

Resources

¹Think Outside the Lunchbox. At:
http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/home_14592_ENU_HTML.htm_HTML.htm, Accessed August 24, 2009.

The American Dietetic Association website contains creative and nutritious lunch box ideas:
www.eatright.org.

The Centers for Disease Control has a website geared to children and adolescents which contains nutrition information, including a section on "Power Packing" school lunch boxes:
www.bam.gov/sub_foodnutrition/powerpacking.html

For information pertaining to food allergies and school, visit the website for the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI):
www.aaaai.org.



Center for Hygiene & Health in the Home and Community

The Center for Health and Hygiene in the Home and Community serves as a national and international resource for information and education, applied research, professional training, and conferences. The Center focuses on issues relating to hygiene and infection control in areas such as:

- Consumer food safety
- Home hygiene
- Daycare
- Preschool
- Homecare
- Sports and leisure activity
- Travel and hospitality

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Back to School

Lunch Box Safety



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As children pick out new notebooks, backpacks, and outfits, what goes into their lunch boxes may be an afterthought. Packing a safe and healthy lunch bag – for school or work – is essential to maintain energy and mental stamina for the whole day.

Involving children in planning their school lunch and snacks makes them more likely to eat the food and not trade lunch with friends, and teaches them the basics of a nutritious meal.

Start Fresh Every Day

Avoiding food poisoning starts with a clean lunch bag.

- Empty, wash and dry your lunch box or bag every day after returning home. An insulated lunch box is easy to clean and keeps food at the right temperature. If using brown paper bags, use a new bag every day
- Don't forget to wash and dry reusable water bottles
- Prepare lunch food on a clean kitchen surface with clean utensils

Pack Nutritiously

With the help of your child, prepare lunch menus for the whole week, make a grocery list, and buy the foods once a week. Simplify by using individually-wrapped portions or prepare single-serving bags of snacks for the week (pretzels, trail mix, cut vegetables).

The American Dietetic Association recommends to "Aim for at least 4 food groups" in your lunch box every day to ensure balance and enduring energy.¹

- **Whole grains:** whole wheat breads, cereals, tortillas, or crackers
- **Protein:** lean deli meats, peanut butter, eggs, tuna, hummus, or cottage cheese
- **Low-fat dairy:** yogurt, cheese, or milk

- **Fruits and vegetables:** whole or cut fruits, cut vegetables – include a yogurt dip or low-fat dressing for dipping

Don't forget nutritious snacks for mid-morning or afternoon, especially if your child has after-school activities. Pack nonperishable foods wrapped individually like granola bars, trail mix, whole fruit, pretzels, or puddings. They can even be left in a child's backpack for a day or two later.



Perishable Safety

Cold foods must stay cold: deli meat, cheese, yogurt, milk, cut fruit, tuna, etc.

Hot foods must stay hot: soup, mac&cheese. These perishable foods must not be allowed to enter the temperature danger zone between 40 and 140°F.

- If you pack lunch the night before, refrigerate all perishables overnight.
- Use an insulated lunch bag or box with an ice pack, a frozen (100%) juice box, or a frozen water bottle.
- Prepare hot foods just prior to leaving for school and use a thermos. Preheat the thermos with hot water while preparing the food.
- Instruct your child to dispose of uneaten perishable food immediately after lunch. Perishables can spoil at room temperature if saved for an afternoon snack.

Hand Safety

Teach children to wash their hands before and after eating lunch. Because they may be pressed for time, pack a hand sanitizer or wipes containing at least 62% alcohol in their lunch bag. For proper hand washing technique, consult the brochure [Proper Hand Washing](#)

Swapping Safety

There are two major reasons for children not to trade lunches:

- Risk of infection: their friend's lunch may not have been packed safely; and if the friend has tasted the food, it may contain germs
- Risk of allergic reaction: if your child's classmate or your own child has food allergies, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI) makes the following recommendations:
 - Avoid packing the 6 foods which account for 90% of food allergies: milk, egg, peanuts, wheat, soy, tree nuts
 - Buy a lunch bag with an allergy warning label on it
 - Ask the school to plan an allergy-free table in the cafeteria



Final Thoughts

If your child craves buying the cafeteria lunch, review the school's menu and pick one day of the week when they can buy their lunch. Make sure that you both agree on the food selection for a well-balanced meal.

A healthy school day starts with a nutritious breakfast that provides energy for the long morning hours. If children don't eat breakfast at home, make sure to pack food they can eat on the ride to school.