

PACK A POWER LUNCH

As summer vacation is coming to a close, students are getting ready to go back to school. It is also the time when parents have to face some challenges like what to pack for their children’s lunch and how to prepare an easy and nutritious lunch.

Research shows that children who eat a healthy lunch learn better in the afternoon. By eating the right amount and type of food, children can get the nutrients they need to grow and learn. Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide gives recommendations on how many servings of food children need per day:

- 1) Vegetables and fruit 4–6 servings
- 2) Grains Products 3–6 servings
- 3) Milk and Alternatives 2–4 servings
- 4) Meat and Alternatives 1–2 servings

Preschoolers and young children have small stomachs. This means that they need to eat small amounts of food more often. Foods can be divided up into smaller amounts and served throughout the day.

A Bunch of Lunch Ideas

Packing a power lunch starts in the grocery store. This list can help you choose healthy foods when grocery shopping. Remember to include something from each of the four food groups in your power lunch. Let children help choose their lunch items at the grocery store. Helping them pack their lunch before bedtime makes it more likely that they will eat their lunch.

Grain Products	Vegetables and Fruit	Milk and Alternatives	Meat and Alternatives
Choose whole grain and enriched products more often	Choose dark green and orange coloured vegetables and orange coloured fruit more often	Choose lower-fat milk products more often	Choose leaner meats, poultry and fish, as well as dried peas and beans more often
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bread (cheese, onion, rye, raisin, whole wheat) • Buns or rolls • Tortillas • Rice • Cereals (hot or cold) • Pasta • Crackers • Muffins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh fruit (apple, banana, cherries, grapes, kiwi, melon, orange, pear, plum) • Raw vegetables (carrots, cucumber, broccoli, celery) • Canned fruit in its own juice (fruit cocktail, peaches, pears, pineapple) • Applesauce • Fruit salad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skim, 1% or 2% milk • Lower fat cheese (e.g. cottage cheese, mozzarella) • Yogurt • Milk based pudding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ham, lamb, pork, roast beef • Chicken, turkey • Salmon, tuna • Hard boiled egg • Tofu (cooked, if not sold in a sealed package) • Cooked beans • Nuts (almonds, peanuts, pecans, walnuts) • Seeds (pumpkin, sesame, sunflower) • Nut spreads (almond butter, peanut butter)

The challenge is to keep lunches creative so kids won't be bored. An insulated thermos or lunch kit with a mini ice pack gives you a bigger choice of hot and cold foods to send to school. Kids love choice and they will be more likely to eat the items in their lunch if they have chosen them. Mix up the grain products: whole wheat, rice, tortillas, sandwich bread, or noodles. Vary fruit options by sending fruit cups packed in juice and seasonal fresh fruit. Send milk, water or 100% fruit juice instead of fruit “punch”, “drink” or “cocktail”, which tend to contain only sugar, water, and flavouring. Leftovers make great lunches too—try to use them for pizza, pasta, or soups.

Healthy lunch idea:

- Spread 1 tablespoon of light cream cheese on a whole wheat tortilla shell.
- Place 1 slice of meat e.g. ham, turkey or beef on top. Layer with vegetables like shredded carrot and chopped lettuce.
- Add mustard if desired. Roll up and enjoy!

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide is available at: www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide