

NUTRITION MATTERS

PACKING HEALTHY LUNCHES AND SNACKS

Healthy lunches and snacks give kids the energy and nutrients they need to learn and play. Studies find that kids who eat better, learn better. Because kids eat at least one meal and two snacks at school every day, it is important to ensure that these meals are nutritious. Read on for tips, ideas and recipes to help make lunches and snacks your kids will enjoy eating.

GET THE SUPPLIES YOU NEED AND MAKE IT FUN!

A little bit of planning can go a long way for busy families. Here are some ideas to help you plan.

- Use a fun, insulated lunch bag or box.
- Be litterless. Use reusable containers for packing food (avoid foil, plastic wrap and baggies). Look for leak proof containers that have a snap top and are easy to open.
- Pre-portion foods like whole grain crackers or cereal in containers ahead of time to make them grab and go.
- Have a bin or shelf that is just for lunch items.
- Use reusable drink containers such as a thermos or reusable water bottle.
- Use stainless steel spoons and forks.

- Keep hot foods hot. Use a wide-mouth thermos for hot foods. Keep food hot until lunch by pre-heating the thermos. Pour hot water in it and let it stand for a minute or two. After you pour out the hot water, immediately put in the hot food and seal the lid.
- Keep cold foods cold. Pack cold lunches with ice packs.

GET THE KIDS INVOLVED!

Getting kids to help pack their own lunch is not only helpful, but it's also a good way for them to start learning how to cook. They will be more excited about their lunch if they help make it. Get kids involved by having them:

- Talk about their lunch likes and dislikes. This is a good opportunity to discuss healthy choices and plan the menu.
- Help make the grocery list and come to the grocery store with you.
- Choose a new vegetable or fruit to include in their lunch.
- Wash vegetables and fruit.
- Peel fruit ahead of time to help save time during lunch and snack.
- Portion out vegetables, fruit or whole grain cereal into snack-sized containers.
- Make their own sandwich.
- Help bake some healthy muffins to freeze.
- Fill their own water bottle each morning.
- Pack everything into their lunch bag.

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675
TTY 1-866-512-6228
york.ca/nutrition

PLAN IT OUT AND MAKE IT COMPLETE!

Use Canada’s Food Guide

(canada.ca/foodguide) to help choose foods.

Choose foods from the three food groupings for lunches and one or two food groupings for snacks. Aim to include at least one vegetable or fruit with each meal and snack.

Consider Leftovers for lunch

- Last night’s dinner can be today’s lunch.
- After dinner, store lunch-size leftovers in glass containers so you can reheat them quickly in the morning.
- Most vegetables and fruit can last several days in the fridge after being washed and cut up.
- Wrap and freeze sandwiches with leftover chicken or roast. They will thaw by lunchtime.
- Pack sandwich toppings like tomatoes and lettuce on the side to keep the bread from going soggy.

A word about food allergies

- Most schools are “peanut/nut safe” which means peanuts or nut products are not permitted. Rules like not sharing food from home help to protect kids with food allergies. Talk to your child about the school’s rules around food allergies

Quick and easy lunch ideas

Use the table below to mix and match meal ideas.

Sample lunch 1: Roast turkey wrapped in a whole wheat tortilla, cherry tomatoes, applesauce and skim or 1% milk or soy beverage to drink

Sample lunch 2: Hummus with whole grain pita, carrot sticks, grapes and yogurt

Sample lunch 3: Leftover chicken soup (with carrots, chicken and noodles), cheese cubes and a peeled orange

Sample lunch 4: Yummy in the tummy banana muffin (see recipe), sunflower seeds, an apple and skim or 1% milk or soy beverage to drink

What about catered or pre-made options?

Catered or pre-made lunch and snack kits are often higher in fat, sugar and salt and lower in nutrients. Make your own low-cost healthy version. Pack foods in a divided container or bento box. Add a sticker, a personalized note or special napkin for fun.

Vegetables and Fruit	Whole Grains	Protein Foods
sliced strawberries	hot or cold whole grain cereal	leftover roasted chicken
sliced pepper strips	whole grain bread or bun	tuna, salmon, egg or chicken salad
cucumber slices	whole grain tortilla	sliced or cubed low fat cheese or cottage cheese
raw baby carrots	whole grain crackers	hummus or bean salad
mango cubes	quinoa or whole wheat couscous	mini mushroom omelet (see recipe)
cherry tomatoes	whole grain pita	black bean and corn salsa (see recipe)
banana	leftover whole wheat pasta	meatballs made with lean ground meat
sliced melon	leftover brown rice	cooked tofu
leftover cooked vegetables	barley in a soup or salad	yogurt or kefir

AIM FOR VARIETY

Kid's tastes change from one day to the next. Offer new foods more than once, whether or not they eat it. It can take ten or more times to try a new food before they accept it. Offer a variety of colours, tastes and textures.

- Slice sandwiches into triangles or diamonds.
- Instead of sliced bread, try whole grain pitas, tortillas and bagels. Rye, pumpernickel and flax are also good options. Choose varieties that list "whole grain" as the first ingredient.
- Offer low fat cheeses like mozzarella, Havarti or Swiss in different forms (cubes, strings, slices).
- Try different vegetable and fruit textures like juicy (clementine), crunchy (carrots) or soft (sliced avocado). Give your kids something different to experience with each bite.

MIX IT UP WITH A VARIETY OF SNACKS

Kids have small stomachs so healthy snacks prevent them from getting hungry between meals. Offer two to three snacks each day. Snacks are an opportunity to offer vegetables and fruit. Many processed snacks like granola bars, cookies or chips cost more and are high in sugar, fat and/or salt.

Quick and easy snack ideas

- Cheese cubes and a fruit or vegetable
- Carrot sticks with hummus or black bean dip
- Nut-free trail mix (mix dried fruit and pumpkin seeds with whole grain cereal)
- Yogurt and a banana
- Carrot, oatmeal or banana muffin and grapes
- Apple slices sprinkled with cinnamon and dry whole grain cereal
- Sliced pears and string cheese
- Yogurt mixed with whole grain cereal

SKIP THE JUICE AND SUGARY DRINKS

Send water, plain white milk or unsweetened fortified soy beverage in reusable containers labelled with your child's name. Keep cold drinks cold by packing it with an ice pack. See if your school offers a milk program.

Chocolate milk, fruit juices (even 100% fruit juice) and fruit-flavoured drinks, such as punches, cocktails, lemonade or iced tea all contain high amounts of sugar.

RECIPES FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES

Black bean and corn salsa pita wraps

Makes about 3 cups (750 mL)

Ingredients

540 mL (19 oz can)	black beans, rinsed and drained
250 mL (1 cup)	drained canned corn
250 mL (1 cup)	diced tomatoes
15 mL (1 tbsp)	olive oil
30 mL (2 tbsp)	lime juice
30 mL (2 tbsp)	finely chopped parsley or 2 tsp dried parsley
2 mL (½ tsp)	minced garlic
1 mL (¼ tsp)	black pepper

Directions

1. Combine and stir ingredients in a medium bowl.
2. Serve with a whole grain pita, grated cheese and lettuce. Older kids can build their own pita wrap at lunchtime.

Mini mushroom omelets

Makes 12 mini omelets

Ingredients

15 mL (1 tbsp)	canola oil
1 package (227 g)	sliced mushrooms
1	onion, diced
5 mL (1 tsp)	Italian seasoning
12	eggs
1 mL (¼ tsp)	salt
1 mL (¼ tsp)	pepper
250 mL (1 cup)	low fat, shredded, old cheddar cheese

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C).
2. In a non-stick skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Cook mushrooms, onion and Italian seasoning for about 10 minutes or until golden.
3. In a large bowl, whisk eggs, salt and pepper.
4. Lightly spray a muffin tin with cooking spray. Divide mushroom mixture among the muffin tin. Ladle egg mixture into muffin tins. Sprinkle each with some of the cheese.
5. Bake for about 20 minutes or until golden.

Try using different vegetables like broccoli or sliced peppers in this omelet instead of mushrooms.

This omelet can be served cold for lunch. Be sure to pack it with an ice pack. Add a healthy drink like water or milk, whole grain crackers and fruit for dessert.



Yummy in the tummy banana muffins

Makes 12 muffins

Ingredients

125 mL (½ cup)	all-purpose flour
125 mL (½ cup)	whole wheat flour
10 mL (2 tsp)	baking powder
1 mL (¼ tsp)	baking soda
175 mL (¾ cup)	quick oats
125 mL (½ cup)	white sugar
60 mL (¼ cup)	lightly packed brown sugar
2	ripe bananas
1	egg
125 mL (½ cup)	milk
45 mL (3 tbsp)	vegetable oil

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. Mix all-purpose and whole wheat flour, baking powder and baking soda in a large bowl. Stir in oats, white sugar and brown sugar. Set aside.
3. Mash bananas in a medium bowl. Add milk, egg, and oil. Mix well. Stir banana mixture into dry ingredients until blended. Do not over-mix.
4. Spoon into non-stick or paper-lined muffin tin, filling almost to the top.
5. Bake until tops are firm when lightly touched, about 15-20 minutes. Remove and let cool.

To make this a complete lunch, serve with sliced vegetables, yogurt and a hardboiled egg.

For more information

For more information and additional nutrition resources, visit www.york.ca/nutrition or www.unlockfood.ca

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000

May be reproduced without permission provided source is acknowledged (2019).