

Lunchbox Makeovers:

Ten Tips for Packing a Healthy School Lunch

Many lunchboxes are overloaded with fat, sugar and salt and are missing fruit, vegetables, and whole grains. However, since a handful of foods do most of the damage to children's diets and health, a handful of changes can go a long way to improving them.

Here are ten easy tips to give your child's lunchbox a nutrition makeover:

- 1. Encourage your child to choose 1% or fat-free milk.** Milk is by far the largest source of saturated fat in children's diets. Choose 1% or fat-free milk instead of whole or 2% milk to keep children's hearts healthy and arteries clear.
- 2. Leave the cheese off sandwiches, unless it's low-fat or fat-free cheese.** Though cheese provides calcium, it is the second leading source of artery-clogging saturated fat in kids' diets. Healthier sources of calcium include lower-fat cheese, fat-free and 1% milk, low-fat yogurt, and calcium-fortified orange juice.
- 3. Switch from fatty luncheon meats to low-fat alternatives.** Supermarkets sell many good tasting, low-fat or fat-free brands of turkey breast, chicken breast, ham, bologna, and roast beef.
- 4. Include at least one serving of fruit in every lunch.** Try buying a new type of fruit each week to let your child discover new favorites. Try pears, sliced melon, cups of applesauce, grapes, or pineapple (fresh or canned in its own juice). Try serving fruit in cut into slices, cubed, or with a yogurt sauce.
- 5. Sneak vegetables – like lettuce or slices of cucumber, tomato, green pepper, roasted peppers, or zucchini – onto sandwiches.** Eating fruits and vegetables reduces your child's chances of heart disease, cancer, blindness, and stroke later in life.
- 6. Use whole grain bread instead of white bread for sandwiches.** Choose breads that list "whole wheat" as the first ingredient. If the main flour listed on the label is "wheat" or "unbleached wheat flour," the product is not whole grain.
- 7. Limit cookies, snack cakes, doughnuts, brownies, and other sweet baked goods.** Sweet baked goods are the second leading source of sugars and the fourth leading source of saturated fat in Americans' diets. Low-fat baked goods can help cut heart-damaging saturated and trans fat from your child's diet, but fat-free sweets can still crowd out healthier foods like fruit.
- 8. Limit potato, corn, tortilla, or other chips.** Save chips for a weekend treat. Fruits and veggies should be the main side dish packed in lunch boxes.
- 9. If you pack juice, make sure it's 100% juice.** All fruit drinks are required to list the "% juice" on the label. Watch out for juice drinks like Sunny Delight, Hi-C, Tropicana Twisters, and Capri Sun, which are just sugar water with a tiny bit of added juice.
- 10. Don't send Lunchables.** Most Oscar Mayer's *Lunchables* get two-thirds of their calories from fat and sugar. Making your own healthy alternative is as easy as packing whole-grain crackers, low-fat lunch meat, a piece of fruit and a box of 100% juice (and it costs less!).