

iggle waggle workshops™

Keeping healthy - Lunchboxes



Whilst school lunches are a good, nutritionally balanced option, many parents prefer to prepare their child's lunch themselves.

Lunchboxes can be a fun way to eat. Nevertheless they need as much thought and planning as any other meal, especially as food is eaten many hours after it is prepared.

Here are some ideas that we know work – and also follow the Food Standards Agency guidelines:

The 4 main food groups to include in every box are:

Calcium (yoghurt, cheese, milk)

Protein (Fish, cheese, chicken, ham, egg)

Complex carbohydrates (wholemeal pasta/bread, dried fruits)

Fruit and Vegetables (vitamins and minerals)

Freshness



Take note of how the food you buy is displayed in the supermarket.

If it is kept chilled or frozen – that is how the food must be kept at home, or in the lunchbox. Remember the 30 minute rule: anything that should be kept cool has just 30 minutes out of the fridge before food bugs start to multiply..

If you are using this kind of food (e.g ham, cheese) then freeze 2 cartons of juice the night before and place them around the food that needs to be cool. By lunchtime the drinks will have defrosted and the food will be safe to eat.

A note on drinks: 'orange juice drink' is very different from orange juice – and can contain very little juice and lots of sugar. Avoid these if possible. Chilled water is both healthy and free!

Sandwiches



Freeze different types of bread. This way you can use just the slices you need again defrosting perfectly. Experiment with grains and seeded bread for lots of flavour and important fibre. Wholemeal bread releases its energy slowly, keeping children alert through the afternoon.

Why not try wraps, rolls or pitta pockets as an alternative? They come in wholefood versions too.

Fillings



Avoid any nuts (i.e peanut butter). There are often children with nut allergies in school and even touching the food can cause a severe reaction. Protein fillings are great for growing bodies; cheese, ham, egg – and try to include some salad or vegetable in every sandwich. Remember: they will not be hiking through the Himalayas – one round of sandwiches is quite sufficient!

Low fat buttery spreads can often have high sugar to compensate. Regular sunflower or olive spread, used sparingly may be a better option.

Really Great Fillings:

- Chopped egg with spring onion
- Tinned tuna and sweetcorn – with a squeeze of lemon
- Ham and cucumber
- Chicken with salad
- Hummus and tomato
- Smoked salmon and crème fraiche
- Bananas
- Refried beans (look for them in the canned food aisle), with avocado
- Greek Salad: Feta cubes, cucumber, tomato and a squeeze of lemon or lime – plus sliced olives if your child likes them
- Marmite/Vegemite (if the rest of the meal is quite filling)

Other Things



It is easy to get into the habit of including crisps and chocolate bars with packed lunches. They are really not needed, and provide a distraction to the nutritious parts of the meal!

Chocolate/Sweets

Sweet things will give your child a sugar 'slump' about 30 minutes after they eat them – making it hard for children to concentrate - and probably grumpy too. (Try cutting out sugars at home for a week and watch the calmness descend...)

Crisps

Many brands of crisps contain as much fat as they do potato.

(As an experiment try setting one alight, and hold a spoon underneath. You will be amazed at the fat the spoon collects.)

Crisps are also full of salt, which children's bodies find very difficult to process

For the 'extras' try:

- Fruit/Fruit salad. A piece of fruit should be in every lunchbox
- Crudités. Strips of carrot, halved mange tout and cucumber slices taste fantastic with a tasty dip. Many children love hummus and Tzatziki.

- Dried Fruit. Raisins are only one option – there is a wide range of dried berries and fruits in most supermarkets now.
- Muesli bars – but be careful to read the labels. While the grains and fruits provide steady energy release – some are packed with fat and sugar. Others are fine, and nutrition information is always on the packages. Better still – make your own (see Yummy recipes page)



Fun

Healthy eating should be FUN.

Here are a few ways of topping up the fun and giving your child a lovely reminder of home.

- Use biscuit cutters to make pretty sandwiches
- Write messages on your banana. You can even safely colour in with felt tips. They love it!
- Kebabs. Small bamboo skewers are widely available. Thread your skewers with alternating fruit such as strawberries and blueberries. For a savoury option, try cheese and raw peppers. Remember to snip the pointed end off before you pack.
- Construction box. Choose a Tupperware with separate compartments (or several small ones). Separate food such as salad and dressing, or crackers and cheese, so that your child can enjoy taking part in some preparation. Children are proven to try foods more readily that they have played a part in preparing.

General Tips

- Why not dispense with the lunch box altogether and choose an American style recyclable brown bag? That way at the end of the day, there are no smelly warm lunchboxes to contend with. Use foil instead of Clingfilm and everything can be tossed into the recycling bin.
- Do include foods that you know your child enjoys.
- Lots of things work in a flask. Baked beans, soup, noodles – and will stay warm until lunchtime.
- Include a napkin or a couple of wet wipes.
- Do resist including sweets and crisps. It will help your child learn better.
- Pack an amount that your child will manage. If you know our child eats slowly – choose foods that are not too time consuming to eat.
- Consider a flask of soup. We have recipes for soup on the recipes page. Soup makes a warming, nutritious lunch – and is easy to digest.
- Do teach your child that their sandwich or 'main' savoury food should be eaten first. Your school is likely to encourage this – help them by setting this as a house rule.
- Do consider fat content, but don't cut it out altogether. Children need more fats in their diets than grown-ups, but try to ensure that they are unsaturated or contain essential fatty acids (EFAs). Good examples are avocado and mackerel.
- Do check what they have eaten. If the same foods are returning home untouched – consider what you could replace them with.
- Do try to find the time to plan the week's lunchbox menu in advance. Perhaps write it on your planner, so preparing lunch is straightforward with no extra trips to the shop.
- Or cut out the foods and have your child help you use the planner on the following page.

Wiggle Waggle Workshops™

My Lunchbox Week



Which Sandwich?



Which Fruit?



Salad / Vegetable?



Something Else?



Something Else?



Monday



Tuesday



Wednesday



Thursday



Friday

