

Healthy Lunchbox Guidelines

As parents we sometimes feel pressurised into filling our children's lunchboxes with the latest gimmicky foods. Make no mistake, we are targeted in a big way by the food industry. Pre-packaged lunchbox "foods", high in salt, fat, sugar and additives, are pushed by slick advertising campaigns. Cheap to produce and profitable, these unhealthy products use every trick in the book to get into your child's lunchbox. Adverts often don't tell the whole story, and ad-campaigns are designed to get kids nagging their parents. We think that it is about time that parents took the power back!

To keep your child healthy – to prevent obesity and the future risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer – it's important to provide wholesome grub for your child's lunch. Good lunchtime food will also help your children to perform well at school.



According to the World Health Organisation, Low intake of fruit and vegetables causes about 19% of gastrointestinal cancer, 31% of ischaemic heart disease and 11% of stroke. Help your child to be healthy, and include fruit when you can! If you don't have fresh fruit to hand, include some dried fruit like raisins, sultanas, dates or apricots



Dairylea lunchables are highly processed, pre-packaged meals that are high in unhealthy saturated fats and salt. Fruit shoot is a "fruit" juice drink that contains very little fruit...you'd need to drink 50 bottles of fruit shoot to get 1 litre of fruit juice

Lunchbox guidelines

- Include a piece of fresh fruit in every lunch if you can - as an alternative, you could include a portion of dried fruit (raisins, sultanas or apricots, wrapped in greaseproof paper)
- Try to include at least one vegetable - many children enjoy scrubbed carrots at lunch
- For added fibre, choose whole-grain bread for sandwiches – if your children don't like brown bread, choose a white bread that has some seeds in it
- If you can, include some salad or fruit in the sandwich - for example peanut butter and banana, ham and tomato, or chicken and lettuce
- Don't include fizzy drinks, fruit drinks or sports drinks with lunches - choose water, milk or 100% fruit juice as healthier alternatives
- Avoid salted, oily foods like crisps (even the "healthy" versions)
- Steer away from cakes, chocolate and sweets

Tips for Parents

Buy a set of small plastic food boxes for individual portions of chopped vegetables, salad and fruit. You can prepare the contents the night before and store in the fridge ready for the morning.

Add cherry tomatoes, raw vegetables sticks/shapes, half a red pepper, a piece of fruit, fruit salad or a small pack of dried fruit.

Ask your child to design a healthy lunchbox menu using these tips - a great way to interest them in healthy food.

Add variety by using different bread - wholemeal, pitta, granary, tortilla wraps, bagels, walnut or soft grain bread.

Try rice, noodle or pasta-based salads or a colourful mixed salad roll. Sweet foods like chocolate and sweets should be occasional treats rather than everyday items.

Children these days eat far more sweets than previous generations...and this will cause serious health problems in the future.

Good sandwich fillings include sliced meat, cheese, tuna, egg and peanut butter.

Water and milk are the best lunchbox drinks. Avoid fizzy drinks, colas and flavoured "fruit drinks" which contain very little fruit.



Making a Difference...

Sometimes we all need that extra bit of encouragement to try new things. It can help to involve your children in lunch box planning and/or shopping.

If that still doesn't tempt them, then try a sticker reward system. Each time your child tries a new, healthier lunch box food or drink, give them a star or sticker (on a wall chart or special notebook). Once they collect five stars, give them a small reward, like a comic, family walk or outing. It's best to make it a non-food reward and agree what it will be at the beginning. Linking a new food to a positive experience can help to establish new tastes and habits.

Keep things positive and don't force your child to eat anything...this is probably the worst thing you could do.

Make sure your school has a healthy eating policy. RedBranch provide many free resources for schools, and we can help schools with policy development and health education.



RedBranch: Irish Advocates for Childrens Food & Physical Activity

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