

# Healthy Lunchboxes A Guide for Parents



## Why are healthy lunches important?

Obesity is a fast-growing public health issue and the global pandemic has added to the issue through self-isolation and children not being able to take part in their usual amount of activity. We have 1 in 3 children leaving primary school who are already overweight or obese and 1 in 5 living with obesity. Sadly, there is now consistent evidence that people who are overweight or living with obesity who contract coronavirus (COVID-19) are more likely to be admitted to hospital, to an intensive care unit and, sadly to die from COVID-19 compared to those of a healthy body weight status. (*Tackling obesity, empowering adults and children to live healthier lives*, government document 2020). Therefore we want to help support our children in choosing healthier eating and exercise habits now.

Providing your child with a balanced packed lunch will contribute to the prevention of obesity as it will limit fat to less than 10 percent of their weekly calorie intake (Livestrong, 2017, para. 3).

A healthy lunch provides children with the key nutrients needed for the day – those that eat a healthy lunch will maintain a higher nutrient intake throughout the day, compared to those who don't.

When provided with these valuable nutrients, children become more attentive. Children who eat nutritious meals and are active will have a higher performance level in school. Healthy foods boost energy; children will become less tired and able to retain more information.

This is beneficial for us and the children as we want them to gain as much out of their school day as possible.

Schools aim to improve the nutrition of all pupils; adapting pack lunches is a vital step towards this goal.



## **How do you introduce more fruit and veg into your child's diet?**

Children often prefer to eat with their hands and are more likely to enjoy foods that are easy to eat. Preparing chopped vegetables or fruit, wholemeal crackers or malt loaf in place of fatty, sugary foods allows your child to snack healthily.

### **Breakfast:**

Cereals can be high in sugar. Porridge or yoghurt added with fruit, or a slice of whole-meal toast are healthier options.

### **Break time:**

Early years and KS1 children are provided with one piece of fruit a day, however children can bring their own fruit and vegetable snacks as well. Fruit and vegetables are ideal snacks for KS2 children to bring from home.

### **Lunchtime:**

Placing salad on sandwiches or carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes or seedless grapes in with their lunch, can be a great way to add extra nutrients.

### **Dinner:**

Try giving two different vegetables with a source of protein – meat, fish or quorn. Stews and casseroles are ideal for packing in lots of vegetables.

### **Which foods are best to avoid?**

If your child has a nutritious lunch, they are less likely to reach for an unhealthy snack later in the day. Treats such as chocolate, sweets, cakes and biscuits should be allowed in moderation – they are full of fat and sugar. Treats are fine as part of a balanced diet, as long as they are given in moderation.

Dried fruits can count towards a child's five-a-day however, they are better given as part of a meal or with something else because they are fairly high in sugar and can affect teeth.

Sugar-free or no-added sugar drinks are much better for contributing to your child's healthy lunch. Water is ideal.



### **Top tips for healthy lunchboxes:**

It is important that children get a range of foods to ensure that they have all of the essential nutrients that they need.

The following components help to form a healthy and balanced packed lunch:

Carbohydrates – starchy foods like bread, pasta and potatoes will help to provide your child with energy to help them to concentrate.

Protein – foods such as meat, fish, eggs or beans are high in protein and will provide your child with iron, magnesium and other essential vitamins.

Calcium – milk, cheese and yoghurt are high in calcium, which is required to help build and maintain strong bones – ideal for growing children.

Fruit and vegetables – packed with nutrients, vitamins and healthy sugars. These can replace unhealthy snacks.

Drinks – water, semi-skimmed or skimmed milk are much healthier than sugary drinks.

### **Government guidelines for packed lunches:**

- Include one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables/salad.
- Meat, fish or a non-dairy protein source should be included daily.
- Oily fish, like salmon should be included once every three weeks.
- A starchy food, such as bread or pasta or rice should be included daily.
- Dairy foods such as milk, cheese or yoghurt should be included every day,
- Pupils should have access to free, fresh drinking water at all times.
- Snacks and sweet treats such as crisps and chocolate should be avoided in lunchboxes.



References:

*Tackling obesity, empowering adults and children to live healthier lives* (government document 2020).

Healthy lunchboxes – A guide for parents (Twinkl.co.uk)

Healthy packed lunches: A guide for parents (author unknown).

For further information see:

<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/recipes/healthier-lunchboxes>