

28 Healthy snacks and school lunches

(You can make it in minutes.)

Quick, tasty and easy school lunches that kids and even adults will love and eat.

1. Cookie cutter sandwiches: Make these with your kids. Slice the crusts off the bread and use cookie cutters in fun shapes. Pack a few extra to share with friends.

2. Nuts to You! One of the most boring things about brown bag lunches is the lack of variety and texture. Adding nuts or sunflower seeds to salads, soups and even sandwiches makes for crunch appeal. Try some toasted, spiced pecans in your bag instead of chips.

3. Mail Bags: This is fun for kids: include some mail for them. A note from you, a newspaper clipping, even a piece of junk mail you don't plan on opening (kids love to open things!) How about printing out something fun from the Web and including it?

4. Stickers: If you use brown paper bags, decorate them with stickers, especially at holidays. This is not just for kids, because adults love to show off something special sent from home, too. And there's such a variety of theme-oriented and playful stickers these days.

5. Alphabet stamps: My mom used to take alphabet rubber stamps and ink pads and decorate my lunch bags with words and sentences. Try making up riddles, or jumbled words for your kids to unscramble.

6. Joke-a-Day: Do you have one of those jokes a day calendars? Keep the old ones and throw 'em in your family lunch bags. The day may be gone but the joke's still good.

7. Silly Pasta Salads: Pasta now comes in all sorts of fun shapes: basketballs, grape clusters, Christmas trees... Make pasta salads using these silly shapes, and the kids will especially love them. Throw together some leftover pasta, some veggies, ham or whatever else your kids like, and you're set. Pack some dressing to add at lunch time.

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8. Grill an extra chicken breast while you're using the barbecue. Chill it, then cut the meat into strips. Pack some containers of dipping sauce (sweet and sour, honey mustard, barbecue) to go with it. Or, if you have some leftover turkey, cut it into cubes and pack it in a plastic container. Send along a container of cranberry sauce for dipping.

9. Pack some homemade bean salad in a plastic container. Add a muffin or a buttered roll to go with it.

10. Sprinkle shredded cheese on a tortilla, top with another tortilla, and cook on an ungreased griddle until the cheese is melted and it's lightly toasted on each side. Let cool, then cut into wedges like a pizza. Pack some salsa for dipping.

11. Spread a tortilla with cream cheese, sprinkle with chopped raw vegetables, and roll up. Cut into 1 in. (2 cm) slices and packed in a plastic container. Or do the same thing with peanut butter (if there are no peanut allergies at your child's school) and banana or jam.

12. Pack some delicious hummus in a plastic container. Cut a pita up into wedges for dipping along with some carrot sticks, celery sticks, broccoli, cauliflower, green pepper - whatever your child likes. Send along a few potato or tortilla chips - just to make it seem like party food.

13. Make some salami roll-ups. Spread thin slices of salami with mustard or cheese, lay a pickle spear on top, roll up and secure with toothpicks. Pack into a plastic container.

14. Cut up some cheese and meat (chicken, ham, kolbassa, whatever) into cubes and pack in a multi-sectioned plastic container. Use some fancy toothpicks to spear the cubes. Or send along a few crackers.

15. Cut a pita bread in half, and pack it in a plastic bag. Send along assorted things to stuff in the pocket like shredded lettuce, tuna salad, alfalfa sprouts, canned chickpeas, grated cheese, chopped hard-boiled egg, and a little container of salad dressing to drizzle on top.

16. Contrary to popular myth, cold pizza is not disgusting. Wrap a slice or two of plastic for lunch. Or make a bagel pizza. Cut a bagel in half, spread with spaghetti sauce and sprinkle with shredded cheese and pepperoni. Bake until the cheese is melted, then let cool completely and wrap in plastic.

17. Make a banana bread sandwich. Spread homemade banana bread with peanut butter or cream cheese, cut into long fingers and pack in a plastic container.

18. Spread a tortilla with refried beans and sprinkle with shredded cheese. Fold in the sides, roll up, and wrap in plastic. Send along a container of shredded lettuce and some salsa to add at lunch. Or make a

chicken taco instead. Spread some salsa on the tortilla, top with shredded, cooked chicken and shredded lettuce. Fold up and wrap.

19. Make some mini-quiches using frozen tart shells or your own homemade pastry, or pick some up at the deli counter. Pack a couple in the lunch box - they're good cold!

20. Make a mini-submarine sandwich out of a hot dog bun, some sliced meats and cheeses and shredded lettuce (hot peppers? olives?). If you really want to go all the way, pack a small container of salad dressing to pour over the fillings at lunchtime.

21. You've heard of ants on a log - what about ants in a log? Stuff lengths of celery along the crease with peanut butter or cream cheese. Insert the ants (raisins, if by the way) into the stuffing, and then squish another peanut butter- or cheese-stuffed celery on top - trapping the ants inside. Wrap tightly in plastic.

22. Zip Those Chips: Instead of costly pre-made single serving packs, use sealable plastic bags and even mix up your favorites. Some of them, like those tasty bean chips, vegetable chips and garlic bagel chips, don't come in single server packs.

23. Stop the Dog: If you are using moist vegetables or condiments, bag them separately then add them to a sandwich at lunch. No more yucky bread.

24. Fast food packets: Next time you eat fast-food, pick up extra packets of ketchup, mustard, salt, pepper, salsa, etc. They are handy for adding flavor to your meal. Condiments can make a sandwich soggy, so adding them fresh from the packet will make your meal tastier.

25. Baby-wipes: Those premoistened wipes can clean messy hands gently. Keep a box in your kid's desk or locker. Also good for wiping up your desk. Pick a fun container: What you carry your lunch in can make a difference in how you perceive your food. Presentation of a homemade lunch is just as important as it is when served on a plate. Kids especially know this and the right lunchbox can make the difference in being accepted by one's peers or not

26. Wash your lunchbox: Bacteria can grow anywhere, so be sure to clean your box or bag out regularly. Safety first.

27. Ice packs: a number of reusable ice packs exist, but you can also freeze those little individual juice containers and let them thaw until lunch time.

28. Thermos: Whether for chilled or hot foods, prepare your thermos by either filling it with either iced or boiling water beforehand. It will more efficiently keep your foods at the correct temperature -- not just more pleasurable to eat but safer. Remember: keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold to avoid food poisoning.

[Sandwich Ideas](#)

Tuck these in a lunch box:

Vegetable sticks with a small container of salad dressing for dipping

Fresh fruit

Pretzels

Celery sticks filled with cream cheese or peanut butter and raisins

Fruit yogurt

Pudding

Crackers--plain or with peanut butter or cheese

Cheese sticks

Graham crackers

Fortune cookies

Dried fruit

Fruit leather

Nuts

Tortilla chips with a small jar of salsa

Small bags of popcorn

Stickers

Make These Crunchy Yummy Recipes for Healthy School Lunch Snacks

Granola - Cookies - Munchies

GOBBLING GRANOLA

1/4 cup butter
1/3 cup firmly packed brown sugar
2 1/2 cups uncooked, rolled oats
1/4 cup slivered almonds
1/4 cup chopped walnuts
1/2 cup raisins
1/3 cup chopped dates
1/3 cup chopped dried apricots
1/3 cup chocolate chips

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Melt the butter in a 15-by-10-inch jelly roll pan.

Stir in the brown sugar until combined.

Stir in the oats, almonds and walnuts.

Spread the mixture in an even layer in the pan.

Bake the granola for 12 to 15 minutes or until it is golden brown, stirring twice during the baking process.

Transfer the pan to a wire rack and cool.

When the mixture is completely cool, stir in the raisins, dates, apricots and chocolate chips.

Store it in an airtight container. Makes about 5 1/2 cups.

MUNCH BUNCH

2 cups oat- or wheat-square cereal

1/2 cup M&M's (plain or peanut)

1/2 cup raisins

1/2 cup shredded coconut

In a large bowl or plastic bag, toss all of the ingredients together.

Pack 1 1/2-cup portions in individual containers or plastic bags.

Makes about 3 1/2 cups.

Chocolate Crinkle Cookies

3/4 cup unsalted butter
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1 cup sugar
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
2 tsp. vanilla extract
3/4 cup semisweet chocolate chips
Confectioners' sugar for dusting the cookies

In a large microwave-safe bowl, heat the butter on high for about 35 seconds or until melted.

Stir in the cocoa powder until combined, and then stir in the sugar.

Let the mixture cool for 10 minutes or until it's tepid.

In another large bowl, stir together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.

Whisk the eggs and vanilla extract into the butter mixture.

Using a wooden spoon, gradually stir in the dry ingredients until combined. Stir in the chocolate chips.

Cover and refrigerate the dough for at least 2 hours or overnight.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Roll the dough into balls that are about 1 1/2 inches in diameter (cookies should contain about 2 tablespoons of dough each).

Lightly coat each ball with the confectioners' sugar.

Place the balls on an ungreased baking sheet, leaving at least 2 inches between them.

Bake for about 12 minutes or until the cookies are set.

Transfer the baking sheet to a wire rack and cool completely.

Repeat until all the dough is used.

Store the cooled cookies in an airtight container. (They also freeze well).

Makes about 25 cookies.

BANANA BREAD

Add peanut butter for protein rich and tasty school lunch

Ingredients

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt
6 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
3/4 cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 cup mashed ripe bananas (about 2 large bananas)>
1/4 cup milk

2 tsp. vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and butter a 4-by-8-inch loaf pan. Lightly dust the pan with additional flour and tap out the excess.

In a large bowl, stir together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. In another bowl, use a wooden spoon to cream together the butter and sugar.

One at a time, add the eggs, beating well with a fork after each addition. Stir in the bananas, milk, and vanilla extract until combined. Stir in the flour mixture until it is just blended.

Scrape the batter into the loaf pan and spread it evenly.

Bake for 45 to 55 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the bread comes out clean.

Remove the pan to a wire rack.

Cool for at least 10 minutes before removing the bread from the pan and letting it finish cooling on the rack.

Store the completely cooled banana bread in an airtight container at room temperature.

Make 1 loaf or about 12 slices.

Spread with Peanut Butter for Delicious Peanut Butter and Banana Bread Sandwiches

Ingredients

1 package (8 oz.) chopped dates
1/2 cup water
1 tbsp. freshly squeezed
lemon juice
1 1/2 cups uncooked, rolled oats

1 cup all-purpose flour
1/3 cup chopped walnuts
1/8 tsp. salt
1/2 cup butter, softened
1/4 cup firmly packed brown sugar

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and lightly butter an 8-inch square baking pan.

In a small saucepan over medium heat, cook the dates with the water for about 7 minutes or until they are softened.

Remove the pan from the heat and cool. Stir in the lemon juice.

In a large bowl, stir together the oats, flour, walnuts, and salt.

In another large bowl, using a wooden spoon, cream together the butter and brown sugar.

Gradually stir in the oat mixture, reserving 1 cup of it.

Firmly press the remaining mixture into the prepared pan.

Spread the dates evenly over the top.

Sprinkle the surface evenly with the reserved oat mixture and lightly press it using your fingertips.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until just starting to brown.

Let cool, then cut into bars.

Makes 16 squares.

School Lunch Sandwich Ideas - Gems for Healthy School Lunches

Take a few minutes to put together something tasty, healthy, and enticing!

How to Make a Super Sub Sandwich

1 medium hero roll
4 to 6 slices of thinly cut cheese and/or sliced turkey or other meat
4 thin tomato slices
1/2 cup shredded lettuce
2 tsp. vegetable oil
2 tsp. red wine vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste

Slice the hero roll in half lengthwise and scoop out some of the soft bread inside.

Line both sides of the roll with your child's favorite cheese and meat.

Top with the tomato slices and shredded lettuce.

Sprinkle the surface evenly with the oil and vinegar and season with salt and pepper and any special additions.

Close up the sandwich, then cut it in half and wrap it in plastic wrap or aluminum foil.

Makes 1 large sandwich.

Turkey Bologna Boat Sandwich

1 tsp. mustard
1 slice turkey bologna)
1 slice American cheese
1 hot dog bun

Spread the mustard onto the slice of bologna.

Top with a slice of cheese and roll them together.

Place the roll in the hot dog bun and wrap it in aluminum foil.

Makes 1 serving.

Gems for Fun and Healthy School Lunch

To ensure the right amount protein and produce, consider packing wraps, with turkey, tuna, tofu, hummus, ham, chicken and instead of veggies within, veggies on the side; bean salad; edamame; pasta salad with vegetables; marinated veggies; fruit salad; raw veggies with guacamole or hummus dip; chopped salad; and roasted vegetables.

Try flavor packets for protein to help meet a variety of taste buds. There are many options to try, but try Caesar, BBQ, Teriyaki, Mexican, Jerk, Lemon herb, or honey mustard.

Kids Turkey Sandwich

Start with two slices of whole wheat bread. Use a 2 inch-wide

cookie cutter or standard drinking glass to create the turkey's body.

Cut a rectangle slice of bread from the leftover pieces for the turkey's neck/head.

Make a turkey sandwich with the two round slices of bread.

Add a slice of roast turkey, a slice of cheese and top it with cranberry sauce.

Place the rectangle piece of bread on top of the sandwich and attach it with a swipe of mayo.

Cut two semi-circles of cheese for the beak.

Add two raisins (or chunks of olive) for eyes.

Cut 2 inch strips of colorful sweet peppers.

Tuck these under the sandwich as feathers.

Add a piece of red pepper for the gobbler.

Kids will gobble these right up! Lunch time doesn't need to revolve around sweets and pre-packaged junk.

Pita Sandwich Kids Like

1 pita bread cut in half

2 tsp. mayonnaise

2 tsp. yellow or Dijon mustard

Sandwich vinaigrette to taste - can be purchased at the store

4-6 oz. sliced chicken or turkey meat

½ avocado, sliced lengthwise

Alfalfa sprouts

½ tomato, sliced thin

Open pita bread halves and add 1 tsp. mayonnaise, 1 tsp. mustard, half of the meat, avocado, sprouts and tomato to each pita half. Sandwich vinaigrette should be added over top last. Wrap the sandwich immediately.

Cheese and Fruitwich

½ c Cream cheese, room temp.

⅛ c Peanuts, unsalted, chopped

½ Apple, cored, sliced, peeled

2 Drops lemon juice

2 Date-nut bread slices

Combine the cream cheese and nuts in a bowl.

Sprinkle the apple slices with the lemon juice to keep them from turning brown.

Take a slice of bread, spread with cheese and nut mixture and cover with apple slices. Use another

slice of bread to top the sandwich and wrap well.

Apple and Cheese Sandwiches

Use a clever cookie cutter to slice your apples and cheese into fun shapes. Sprinkle apples with lemon juice to prevent browning

Sunbutter and Jelly Sandwich

Sunbutter is made from sunflowers, and tastes great. Kids love it!

Mini Sandwiches

Add a favorite: meat, cheese, veggies, chickpeas, kidney beans, hummus and condiment inside a King's Hawaiian Bun.

Tuna Salad

Needs to be kept cool, add a small ice pack to your lunch or bento box or mix tuna salad with frozen vegetables and it will be ready by lunchtime.

Favorite Bread

Mix drained tuna with mayonnaise, and one or all of the following: cucumber, carrot, pickled radish, onion

Spread on bread and enjoy!

Tortillas and roll ups/pinwheels can be fun

Perfect for humus, turkey or chicken, cream cheese, nacho cheese spread

Humus Plus

Fill pita, tortilla or burrito with with cheese, cold cuts, veggies and humus

School Lunch prep tips

At the start of the school year buy a package of brown lunch bags and a wide mix of things to fill them with...

granola bars

fruit snacks

jerky sticks

applesauce/ fruit cups, etc.

Spend some time filling the bags up with a blend of some of those options (do while watching a show you like, so it was kind of relaxing). make as many bags up as you have room to store .

In the morning before school add a sandwich or other more healthy thing to it to have a nice full lunch.

Try having your kids make their own lunches. Set up a "lunch station" in my pantry and let the kids pick the snack they want and add a sandwich in the morning.

Meal prep for kids.. maybe it's the new Sunday night activity!

For hot lunches, preheat your thermos. Pour boiling water into the thermos and let it sit in there while you get everything else packed up. Then dump the water, add the hot food. Keeps warm food warm longer.

Zero-waste lunch, what is it? And isn't it impossible to have zero waste in the school lunchroom?

Well, think about what goes into those trash cans, besides all the food, that is. The plastic baggie you put their sandwich in, the 12 oz. pint carton of milk or a juice box, the individually-sized fruit or yogurt cup together with a plastic spoon. Add in any napkins and straws, their individually-wrapped cookies or crackers, and put it all in a brown bag because your child outgrew his lunchbox. Now multiply that by every kid that goes to school, 5 days a week and that's a lot of waste! And for every adult that's brown-bagging it to save money well, here are some ideas for the whole family, and you'll save money and waste in the long run.

Start with the lunch box/bag, whatever you want to call it.

Your options for stylish at any age are endless, including the old brown bag look-alike. When shopping at my local discount retailer, I've found insulated ones near the coolers, more stylish versions near the briefcases and luggage, and kids' favorites in the school supplies. You can find them easily online by going to the [Green Retailers](#), which will link you to a variety of earth-friendly retailers.

Other than the insulated ones, there are also some sleek, compartmentalized versions of the Japanese Bento Kit. Everything has its place, no extra baggies or packaging needed. And they come with their own cutlery, even. Some kids may prefer the simplicity of a fold-over bag or plain lunch box style. In that case, a collection of small plastic containers, such as the Rubbermaid, Glad and Zip-Lock ones at the store, will come in handy.

For a Hot Lunch

There's nothing like the old standby insulated canister we all called a thermos. Thermos still makes them, in a wide variety of shapes and sizes for a perfect fit for your new lunch box, as do a variety of manufacturers. Call it a stainless steel lunch jar if you want, it'll always be a thermos to me, and the soup will still be hot four to six hours after you packed it.

Food containers

Wrap-n-Mat fills the bill in a pinch. You can wrap any size sandwich, even a nice sub that wouldn't fit into a plastic bag anyway. You can purchase them on the internet , at your local discount retailer, yes, even at the dollar store. Or you can [make your own](#).

Water Bottles

The number one back-to-school item this year is a very special re-usable water bottle. Sure, you may need to buy several for the kid who forgets things, or you could pick up the most useful backpack clip in the world. It attaches to most bottle sizes, but not all, so get a clip or two first, then go shopping for the water bottle that fits. And now that it's not going to get lost, go ahead and splurge on that nice stainless steel model.

There's been so much information coming out lately about the safety of all the different plastics out there. Before you buy, check out [the eco-friendly kitchen](#) options for less plastics in the kitchen. Make sure the reusable lunch is truly safe for your kids' lunch.

Eco-Friendly Cutlery

Don't forget cloth napkins and stainless steel or reusable plastic cutlery. When lunchtime is over throw it all back into the bag and bring it home, to wash and re-use. There you have it, zero-waste. Now if you could only get them to eat all the food.