

Lunchbox Basics!

Safe Packing!

With a little planning it's a snap to pack a delicious, nutritious and safe lunch for your kids. Let your kids help and soon they'll be safely packing their own lunches!

The Night Before:

- Wash hands! Safe food begins with clean hands.
- Prepare and refrigerate any perishable foods.
- Use an insulated lunchbox. If the lunchbox can fit in the fridge, consider putting it in the fridge – with the lid open – to pre-chill.
- Freeze water bottles or juice boxes; and freezer gel packs.

In the Morning:

- Put freezer gel pack and frozen water/juice in Ziplocs to prevent condensation from wetting other items.
- Place a gel pack on the bottom of the cooler and put the most perishable lunch items directly on top.
- Use a cloth napkin or paper towel to cover lunch items, and then put snack items on top. This helps keep the cold air in with the lunch items when the lunchbox is opened for snack-time. Tell your child to leave the napkin in place until lunchtime!
- If you are packing hot items in a thermos, consider sending that separately.
- Place frozen water/juice in with the snack on top. This will keep the snack cold as it thaws.
- Be sure the lunchbox is well closed.

After School:

- Lunchboxes can be a breeding ground for germs. Clean out your child's lunchbox daily with a disinfectant and soapy water and let air dry.



Insulated Food Jars

An insulated food jar opens the door to all kinds of lunch possibilities. Healthy, homemade pasta dishes, hearty soups and even last night's leftovers can all be kept at hot and at a safe temperature with these! Here are a few tips that may come in handy:

- Not all thermoses are created equal! Use a good quality vacuum insulated food jar.
- Make sure your child can open the thermos by themselves.
- How you put foods in the jar is important. Before adding food, fill the jar with boiling water and let stand a few minutes. Empty the water and fill with steaming hot food.
- Try this at home before sending to school to make sure the food stays at a safe temperature – test the temperature of the food with an instant read food thermometer 4-6 hours after packing.
- Insulated food jars are not just for hot foods. These keep cold foods cold as well. Chill the container before adding cold foods by letting ice water sit in it for several minutes before filling.

Testing, Testing....

Do a quick test run before school starts to make sure the meals will be safe and appetizing.

Prepare the lunchbox and leave on the kitchen counter. After 4-6 hours, use an instant read thermometer to test the temperatures of the perishable cold items as well as any hot items.

Cold items should be under 40F and hot items should be above 140F for optimal safety. Between 40 and 140 is considered "The Danger Zone"

Perishable foods are not considered safe to eat once they have been in "The Danger Zone" for 2 hours. It's in this zone that bacteria grow and multiply rapidly.

Healthful Ideas

1. Although kids do tend to eat the same things over and over again, they can get bored, too! An easy way to mix things up is to use different breads. Try small bagels, English muffins, dinner rolls, and pita bread.
2. Although whole wheat is always preferable, it isn't nourishing if the kids won't eat it! Send them to school with the healthiest foods possible, but ones they will eat.
3. Leftovers make great lunches! To ensure they are safe to eat, refrigerate all leftovers promptly after dinner.
4. Try simple - and nutritionally complete - meals like chicken & rice and soups.
5. Do the kids like Mexican food? Make beef and bean burritos, heat until steaming, wrap in aluminum foil and place in an insulated food jar.
6. Use cookie cutters to cut sandwiches, quesadillas and cheese into different shapes. Witches during October are Christmas trees in December are fun!
7. Let kids help plan their lunch. Give them two or three healthy options to choose from and let them help prepare it. If the kids are small, this seems like a lot of work, but soon they may be able to make them all on their own!
8. Baked tortilla chips and refried beans or salsa make a great snack, as do pretzel sticks with peanut butter.
9. Include a little something in your child's lunchbox - maybe a knock-knock joke, a personal note or even a special pencil or eraser.
10. So many kids go to school with sweets in their lunchbox. Homemade cakes and cookies can be a real treat and still healthful! When baking quickbreads, muffins and cakes, experiment with the following substitutions:
 - * Use 1/4 whole wheat flour and 3/4 all-purpose white flour for added fiber.
 - * For every 1/2 cup of oil in the recipe, use 2 Tbsp oil and 6 Tbsp of unsweetened applesauce. Use 1/4 less sugar as the applesauce adds natural sweetness.