

LOADING UP THE LUNCH BOX

Kids eat about a third of their daily food at school. That's why it's important that food eaten at lunch is full of the vitamins, minerals and energy kids need to learn, concentrate and play. Load up the lunch box with healthy "everyday" foods, and a few "sometimes" foods. Most pre-packaged foods fit into the "occasional" category and should be provided as an occasional treat.

Everyday foods are appropriate to eat everyday e.g. milk, bread, fruit, vegetables, nuts, bread, protein foods

Sometimes foods should be restricted in size or quantity or not necessarily eaten every day e.g. a muffin or plain biscuit

Occasional foods are not recommended except as an occasional treat e.g. sweet drinks, confectionary, hot chips and packet chips

Lunchbox Tips

- Discuss lunchbox options with your child and make a list of the "ten top sandwich fillings".
- Wholemeal or wholegrain bread is more filling. Introduce this by a "rainbow" sandwich with one slice of white and one slice of grain, or a 3 slice sandwich with white in the middle and wholegrain on the outside.
- Cooked fruit (e.g. pineapple, peaches) is a good alternative to fresh fruit and has good nutritional value.
- Leftovers from the night before can make a great lunch or snack – e.g. pasta, a chicken drumstick, a corn cob, cooked potato, kumara or taro.
- Use leftover pasta to make a pasta salad. Simply add chopped tomato, spring onion, corn, tuna and a lite mayonnaise.
- Carrot, celery, and cucumber sticks are great by themselves or with some hummus, salsa or yoghurt to dip them in.
- Healthy snacks for the lunchbox include plain popcorn, nuts and dried fruit.
- Juice may be suitable for fast-growing children who can't seem to eat enough food, but for most children juice and other sweet drinks should only be a "sometimes" food.
- Water is the best thirst-quenching option. Buy your child a cool water bottle.
- Try rolling bread around a filling e.g. a whole banana, or a crab stick with lite mayonnaise.



Crackers – are they healthy?

Choose crackers carefully – many are high in fat and salt. Look at the label and choose one with 10 grams or less of total fat per 100 grams. Opt for wholegrain crackers with reduced salt.

Muesli bars – are they healthy?

Muesli bars and other sweet snack foods shouldn't be eaten every day. If you do buy these look for bars with Energy of less than 600kJ per serve and fibre of at least one gram per serve (these are likely to be the ones with minimal chocolate coating). As an alternative experiment with home baking – reduce the amount of sugar and butter/oil by substituting it with fruit or low fat yoghurt. Apple puree will make baking really moist.

Alternative Bread Ideas

- kumara
- fa'apapa
- taro
- rewena bread
- homemade pizza
- fruit bread
- a homemade muffin
- crackers
- pikelets
- corn thins
- scones
- leftover pasta
- pita bread pockets
- Wheat/Weet biscuits

Alternative Protein Ideas

- Boiled eggs
- Chicken drumsticks
- Lentils or beans (e.g. in soups/dip)
- Peanut butter (low salt)
- Baked beans

Healthy Snack Ideas

- Plain popcorn
- Nuts and dried fruit
- Baby carrots, cherry tomatoes
- Peas in the pod
- Vegetable sticks and a healthy dip (e.g. hummus, salsa, guacamole)

Check out www.ccdhb.org.nz for previous monthly articles and healthy recipes

Sandwich ideas

Peanut butter, cheese and marmite/vegemite sandwiches are great staples for the lunch box, but have you ever thought about these sandwich ideas:-

- Leftover baked kumara or taro with cold meat and another filling such as lettuce or avocado
- Peanut butter and grated carrot
- Cheese, vegemite/marmite and lettuce
- Grated cheese and chutney or relish
- Grated cheese and drained crushed pineapple or chopped celery
- Mashed peas
- Canned salmon or tuna mixed with a small amount of lite mayonnaise or lite cream cheese
- Peanut butter and banana
- Boiled eggs mashed with a little lite mayonnaise to bind. Add curry powder if desired.
- Hummus with lettuce or coleslaw
- Avocado and cottage cheese (or lite cream cheese)

Ever tried a jaffle? It's a toasted sandwich made with wholegrain bread or fruit toast and eaten cold. Try fillings such as cheese and tomato, spaghetti, creamed corn, cheese and pickle, cheese and ham - or a sweet jaffle, such as apple and cinnamon.

Food allergies – some children are allergic to nuts and peanut butter. Check if your school has a policy on this.



Food safety if using leftovers for school lunches

Meat and dairy products kept warm for a prolonged period are a potential food safety issue. In order to minimise risk leftovers should be put in the fridge as soon as possible after dinner, eaten within 24 hours of being cooked, and reheated only once. Other tips are:-

- Over the summer period encourage your child to eat meat, fish and dairy products at morning tea.
- A frozen chiller pad, bottle of water, or frozen yoghurt provide a great chilled environment.