

Pack a Balanced Lunch

Fruits and vegetables. They're low in calories (so you can eat a lot), and they're high in fiber, vitamins and minerals.

High-fiber grains. Whole-wheat bread, cereals and pasta are filling and lowfat. Whole-grain foods are naturally cholesterol free.

Protein-rich foods. Lean meat, skinless poultry, a hard-boiled egg, peanut butter or beans — protein-rich foods help boost energy and alertness throughout the day.

Low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Yogurt, cottage cheese and part-skim cheeses make high-energy snacks and help to meet your body's calcium needs.

FOR
WORK
OR
SCHOOL

Making Kids' Meals Fun and Healthy

Pack lunches your children won't trade away with these ideas:

Decorate. Cover your child's lunchbag with stamp prints or stickers. Encourage older children to personalize their own lunch bags or boxes.

Mix up textures. Add small containers of crunchy nuts, berries, granola, diced vegetables or fruit to be eaten as a snack or added to yogurts and sandwiches.

Be silly. Pack snacks in Chinese takeout containers (available at party supply stores) or create a pasta salad with macaroni that is shaped like basketballs or the alphabet.

Keep it cold. Pack a frozen juice box in your child's bag. It will be thawed by lunchtime for a refreshing drink; it will also keep food cold.

Include a sweet treat. Instead of cookies or candy, pack a joke or a handwritten note in your child's bag. The best treats often are sweeter to the spirit than the tongue.



Pressed for Time?

If you feel like you don't have time to bring meals from home, consider these tips — most take less time than waiting in line at the local drive-through.

Shop for a week's worth of portable meals on your day off and do as much of the prep work ahead of time as you can. Store foods in individual-sized containers in the fridge or freezer so that you can grab-and-go on your way out.

Keep extra utensils, napkins and condiments at work so you don't have to carry them back and forth.

Prep your thermal food container. Fill it with boiling water and let it sit for a few minutes before filling it with hot soup; or fill it with ice water for cold contents. Chilling or heating the inside of the Thermos before filling will keep its contents at the correct temperature for longer.

Have a supply of bite-sized raw or lightly steamed vegetables

in your refrigerator to add to salads, sandwiches, pasta dishes and snack cups.

Store homemade trail mix in an airtight container (you can even keep it at work). Include your favorite cereal, granola, mini pretzels, nuts, seeds and raisins.

When dinner is over, pack leftovers in individual-sized containers so you have lunch ready for the next day.

Use an assembly-line approach, especially when you're making more than one lunch. It saves time.

Final thought: Make your homemade lunches tasty, nutritious, filling and satisfying, and you have less temptation to eat out. Instead, use the time you save on your lunch break to walk and enjoy the fresh air. Soon, waiting in line at lunchtime will be a distant memory.



HEALTHY BROWN BAG LUNCHES

TASTY MEALS
MADE EASY



PUT A LITTLE LOVE IN YOUR LUNCH

There's comfort (and usually better nutrition) in a good meal prepared at home. And brown bag lunches have come a long way since soggy school sandwiches. Made with a variety of crunchy, flavorful and exotic ingredients from your local grocery, homemade lunches can satisfy a hearty appetite, keep you healthy and save you money all at the same time.

Don't just eat — enjoy! Read on for simple tips for packing great meals.



4 Essentials of a Great Lunch at Work

- 1. Tasty.** Include your favorite foods and treats in your homemade lunch so that you won't be tempted to eat out. Don't forget snacks!
- 2. Safe.** Wash your hands and use clean preparation methods while making and packing food. Keep foods at the proper temperature in insulated containers.
- 3. Healthy.** The best meals begin with whole grains, lean protein, fruits and vegetables (with emphasis on fruits and vegetables) and low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Think whole-grain breads, string cheese, sliced apples and grape tomatoes, for example.
- 4. Convenient.** Bagged salads, deli dishes and single-serving containers — portable food has never been easier. Make your own frozen entrees by batch cooking on the weekends and freezing individual servings for the next week's lunches.



Beyond Plain Sandwiches: Fun (and Portable) Food Ideas

The best part about bringing meals from home is that you control portion sizes, ingredients and preparation methods, so it's easier to stay on track with your health and weight management goals. If you're looking for more from your lunch than a plain sandwich and chips, **consider these ideas:**

Hearty breads. Compared with white bread, whole-grain and seeded breads, bagels and pitas are better for you, better tasting and less likely to turn soggy before mealtime.

Fresh greens. Bagged, ready-to-use lettuces and leaf spinach are available in most markets. Layer them with raw or roasted vegetables and add a grilled leftover chicken breast.

Fun dips. Fruits, vegetables, crackers, bagels or dried vegetable chips — all are begging to be dipped. Hummus, nut butter and bean dip are high-protein, hearty and tasty. **More ideas:** nonfat yogurt mixed with herbs, low-sugar fruit spread, pesto, salsa or fat-free salad dressing. Just make sure the dips are low in saturated fat.

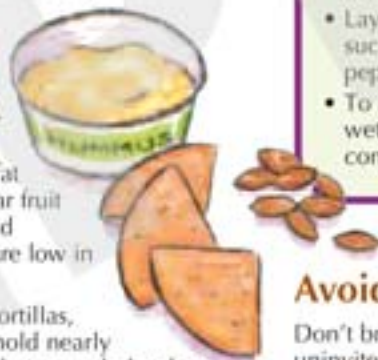
Rolled wraps. Whole wheat tortillas, flatbread and other wraps can hold nearly anything you crave, from simple tuna salad or ham and cheese to leftover steak and crisp salads.

Tasty soups. Hot and cold soups can be made in large batches at home and frozen in portable portions, or bought prepared. Use a wide-mouthed thermal mug to keep hot soups hot and cold soups cold.

Crunchy nuts and seeds. Walnuts, roasted almonds, toasted sesame seeds and sunflower seeds make very flavorful, nutritious additions to any diet — in small amounts.

Flavorful beans and peas. Lentils, beans, chickpeas and other dried legumes can be used to add protein to salads and to make dips and spreads. For a different snack, try spicy wasabi peas, sweet dried snap peas or soy nuts.

Healthy and easy brown bag meals don't require chef-like skills in the kitchen — just a little planning and organization.



Build a Better Sandwich

- Use whole wheat bread instead of enriched white or wheat breads.
- Enjoy leftover home-cooked meats such as roast beef, chicken breast or lean pork.
- Skip the high-fat mayo. Instead, try other condiments such as relishes, pickled vegetables, sun-dried tomato spread or mustard.
- Layer your sandwich with flavorful vegetables such as sprouts, cucumbers, spinach and bell pepper slices.
- To avoid soggy bread, keep condiments and wet ingredients, such as veggies, in a separate container until just before you eat.

Avoid Food-Borne Illness

Don't bring bacteria along as an uninvited guest in your lunch.

WASH your hands. Clean your hands with warm, soapy water before you prepare or eat food.

CLEAN your container. Wash food containers after every use. Don't forget to clean out the inside of your reusable lunchbag with hot, soapy water and let it dry thoroughly.

USE bags once. Toss plastic and paper bags that have contained food, or save them as trash bags. Used bags can harbor harmful bacteria.

WATCH the temperature. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Cold packs, insulated containers or a frozen juice box or bottle of water can help.

DON'T let perishable foods sit at room temperature for more than two hours.

AVOID cross contamination. Use one set of prep items for raw meat and poultry and another for raw foods such as vegetables and fruits.

