

## Healthy Lunches for Children

### Good Nutrition = Good Learning

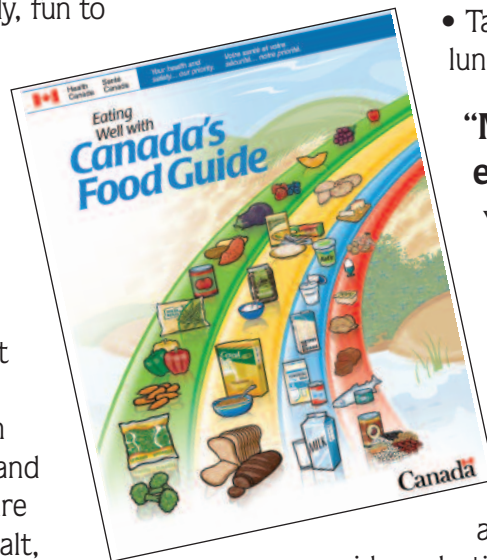
Children want lunches that taste good and keep them full, and parents want a healthy meal for their growing, active children. Children learn and focus better when they eat foods from the four food groups in *Canada's Food Guide*. Nutritious lunches and snacks are best when they are tasty, handy, fun to eat, and safe from bacteria.

### What is a healthy lunch for children?

Include a variety of foods from at least three of the four food groups: Vegetables & Fruit, Grain Products, Milk and Alternatives, and Meat and Alternatives. Children are eating too much fat, sugar, and salt, and not enough vegetables, fruit, milk products and whole grain foods. Unhealthy lunches at school are part of the problem.

### Preparing a healthy lunch for your children

No meal is a good meal if it is not eaten. Work together with your children to make a tasty and healthy lunch that they will enjoy eating.



- Involve your children in grocery shopping and planning their lunch.
- Let your children make their own lunch, choosing foods from *Canada's Food Guide*.
- Add interest by combining new foods with old favourites.
- Everyone enjoys a surprise. How about a secret note, sticker or cartoon with lunch?
- Take time after dinner to prepare a healthy lunch with your children for the next day.

### “My children eat the same food every day!”

Your children are developing their tastes and may be very choosy about what they will eat. The more often they see new foods, the more likely they will taste them and learn to accept them. Don't give up if your children refuse a new food. Sometimes it takes up to 12 attempts before a new food is accepted. Help your children to accept a wider selection of foods by:

- Being a role model. Set an example by trying new foods yourself.
- Offering small amounts of the new food with a familiar one.

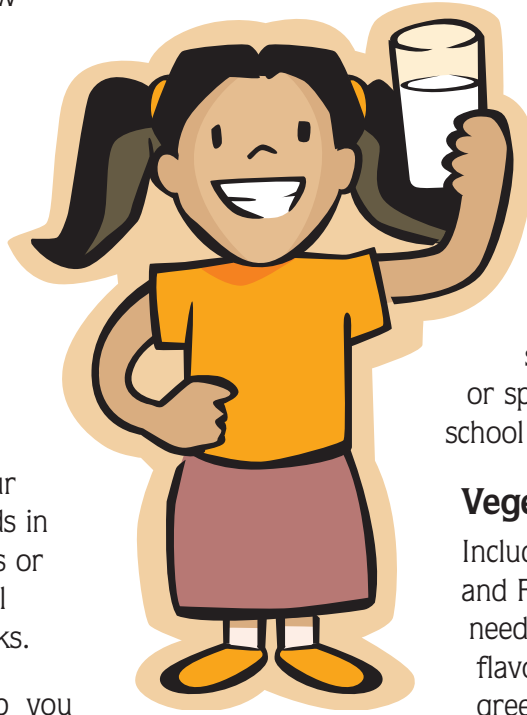
**80% of children are eating lunch at school; it is important that the foods they eat keep them healthy and help them learn.**

- Encouraging children to get to know new foods by including them in growing, buying, preparing or serving these new foods.
- Respecting that children have their own likes and dislikes.

**“It’s just so easy to pick up something ready to go and pack it in the lunch bag!”**

Convenience foods are expensive and high in fat, sugar and salt. It may be the fancy packaging that interests your children, so try packing healthier foods in fun packages. Try coloured lunch bags or plastic containers, add stickers, special napkins and colourful straws for drinks.

Check out page 4 for ideas to help you pack healthier lunches.



**Beyond Sandwiches**

Sandwiches may be convenient, but they are not the only way to have a delicious, nutritious lunch. What about cold pasta salad, a slice of pizza, a chicken leg, a hard-boiled egg or a bean burrito. Hot soups, stews, chili, baked beans or spaghetti can also be carried to school in a wide mouth thermos.

**Vegetables and Fruit**

Include 1 to 2 servings of Vegetables and Fruit in lunches for nutrient needs, and to add colour, texture and flavour to the meal. Choose dark green and orange choices such as green pepper rings, broccoli florets, baby carrots, diced cantaloupe and mango pieces. Fruit makes a great finish to lunch, whether it is fresh, canned in its own juices or in light syrup.

**Beverages**

Even drinks can help make a lunch healthy.

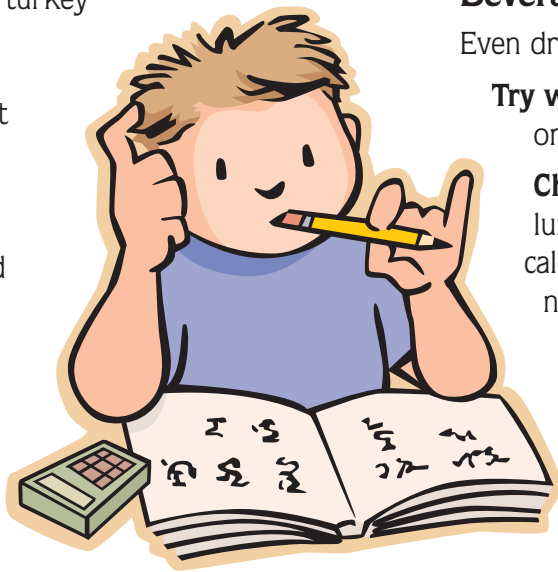
**Try water** – a thermos filled with cold tap water or a refillable container is a great idea.

**Choose milk!** Children who drink milk at lunch are more likely to meet their daily calcium needs. Chocolate milk is just as nutritious as white milk and provides lots of energy plus 15 essential nutrients. Chocolate milk contains about the same amount of sugar as an equal amount of 100% orange juice.

**100% Juice** has some vitamins but no fibre, so have vegetables and fruit more often than juice. When choosing juice, look for labels that say “100% fruit juice.” When the label says *drink, beverage, ade, cocktail or delight*, the product contains mostly sugar and water.

**Jazz up that Sandwich**

- Look for different types of whole grain bread or try two different types of bread in a sandwich. Sliced turkey may be tastier on pumpernickel, multi-grain or whole wheat bread. Crusty rolls, bagels, rice cakes, crackers, English muffins or pita bread all add variety.
- Try combinations of sandwich fillings to give new flavours to old ideas:
  - Canned light tuna with sliced apples and raisins
  - Lower-fat cheese with cucumber slices
  - Egg salad with grated carrot, diced green pepper and chopped celery
  - Cottage cheese or ricotta cheese with orange segments
  - Hummus with roasted red pepper pieces

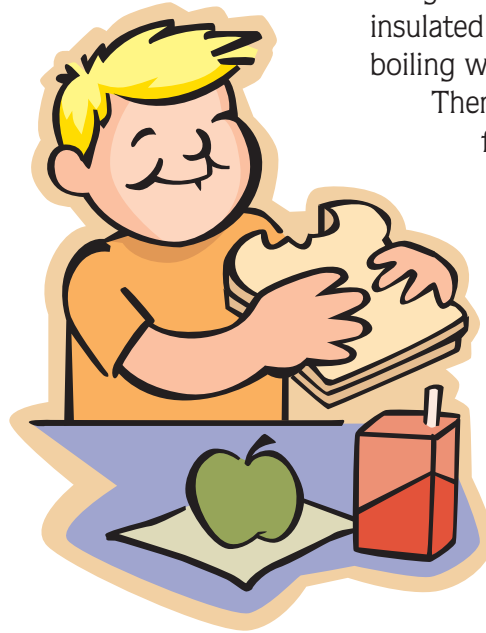


**Check to see if your children’s school has a milk program and sign up so that they can have milk at school every day.**

## Snack Time

Snacks are important because children cannot eat as much food as an adult can at any one time. Your children need a good supply of energy and nutrients to play, grow and learn. As often as possible, the snacks that go to school with lunch should pack lots of nutrition in quick, tasty bites.

Fruit, vegetables, cheese, milk, yogurt, muffins, breadsticks, whole grain crackers or plain popcorn are all great snacks. Limit cake, granola bars and cookies, since they tend to be high in fat and sugar. Choose foods from the four food groups in *Canada's Food Guide*.



refrigerator. To keep hot foods hot, use an insulated bottle or thermos. First, fill it with boiling water and let it stand for a few minutes. Then empty the bottle and fill it with the hot food.

- Only use fresh foods or leftovers which are not more than one day old.
- Clean lunch boxes, thermal bags, plastic containers and all utensils every day in hot, soapy water. Do not re-use wrappings, as they may carry bacteria.
- Wash all vegetables and fruit well under cold running tap water.

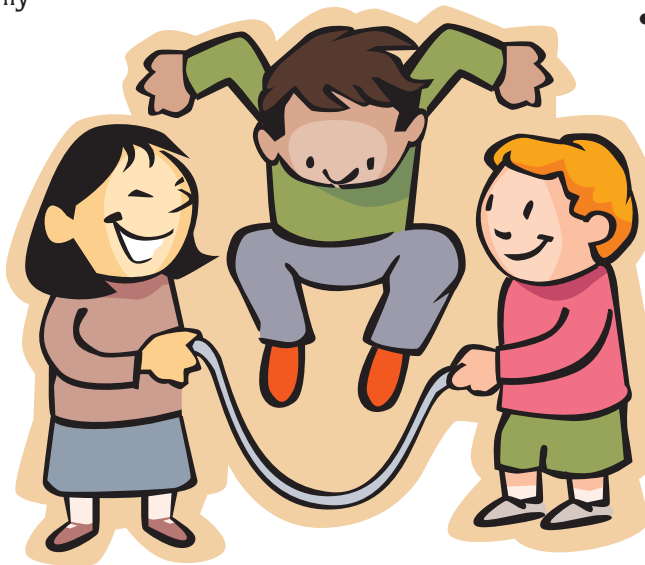
## Lunches for a Happy Planet

- Use cloth or nylon bags, thermal bags or lunch boxes, instead of paper or plastic bags.
- Use reusable plastic containers for sandwiches and other lunch foods.
  - Pack metal spoons or forks for lunches instead of disposable plastic cutlery.
- Try a thermos, plastic cup or reusable water bottle with a tight-fitting lid for beverages.
  - Include a washable cloth napkin – maybe in a different colour each day – instead of using paper products.
  - Buy local fruits and vegetables in season as much as possible. Try to buy only as much as you need to avoid wasting food.

## Keeping Lunch Safe

**A healthy lunch is also a safe lunch.**

- Start with a clean counter, clean fork or spoon, and freshly washed hands.
- Foods that might spoil should be carried in an insulated bag to keep them cold.
- To keep food cold, use frozen bread for sandwiches, pack a frozen juice box or freezer pack with the lunch.
- Pack cold foods directly from the







## Reading Food Labels

Read food labels and choose those products with as little saturated and trans fat as possible. Avoid products that are partially hydrogenated and contain vegetable shortening. Limit foods and beverages high in calories, fat, sugar or salt (sodium).

# Pack Nutrition Power

This chart offers nutrition information for convenience foods and their healthy alternatives.

<i>Instead of these...</i>		<i>Try these...</i>
<b>Convenience Lunch Kits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually more than half the calories come from fat</li> <li>• High in salt</li> <li>• Crackers made with white flour provide little fibre</li> </ul>	vs.	<b>Made at Home Lunch Kit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pack plastic compartments with whole wheat crackers, lean meat, cheese, raw veggies and dried or fresh fruit</li> <li>• Lower in fat and salt</li> <li>• Higher in fibre, vitamins and protein</li> </ul> 
<b>Cookies Dunked in Icing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contain saturated fat and may have trans fat</li> <li>• Cookies and frosting are high in sugar</li> </ul>	vs.	<b>Lower Fat Cookies with Yogurt Dip</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try arrowroots, gingersnaps or animal crackers dipped in a separate yogurt container</li> <li>• Yogurt provides calcium to help build strong bones</li> </ul>
<b>Fruit Flavoured Snacks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contain lots of added sugar and little real fruit</li> <li>• Can stick to teeth and may cause cavities</li> </ul>	vs.	<b>Fruit Cup</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water packed mixtures do not have added sugar</li> <li>• Can be bought in individual sizes</li> <li>• Provides vitamins and fibre</li> </ul>
<b>Mini Cheese and Cracker Sandwiches</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contain saturated fat and may have trans fat</li> <li>• High in salt and low in fibre</li> </ul>	vs.	<b>Part Skim-Milk Cheese and Whole Wheat Crackers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher in fibre and calcium</li> <li>• Lower in fat</li> </ul>
<b>Pop</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One can of pop can have up to 10 teaspoons of sugar</li> <li>• No nutritional value except calories</li> <li>• May contain caffeine</li> </ul> 	vs.	<b>Milk</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be bought in individual containers</li> <li>• An excellent source of protein, calcium, vitamin D and B vitamins</li> <li>• Chocolate milk is a healthy choice</li> </ul> 
<b>Fruit Drinks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Also called punch, cocktail or blend usually have no more than 10% real juice</li> <li>• Contain lots of added sugar and few vitamins</li> </ul>	vs.	<b>Fruit Juice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% pure fruit juice is high in vitamins</li> <li>• Can buy individual tetra packs</li> </ul>
<b>Sports Drinks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contain added sugar and salt</li> <li>• Not needed during regular daily activities</li> <li>• Only needed for long, intense physical activity (more than one hour)</li> </ul>	vs.	<b>Water</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent thirst quencher</li> <li>• A squirt of lemon or lime juice will add extra flavour</li> <li>• Free from the tap</li> </ul> 

Adapted from material developed by Toronto Public Health, Peel Health Department and York Region Health Services. For more information please call Toronto Health Connection at 416-338-7600 to speak with a Dietitian. For additional issues of Nutrition Matters, refer to publications on our Web site at [www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health).

