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Healthier packed lunches

Children need to eat well as it gives them the energy and nutrients to grow, develop, be healthy and active. A healthy, enjoyable lunch gives children the energy they need to learn and play at school.

This leaflet* provides information on how to pack a healthier school lunch and follows the government's packed lunch guidelines.

What is a healthier packed lunch?

A healthy packed lunch is a balanced meal providing a variety of nutrients, to be found in four food groups:

1. Starchy foods

Base each meal on a starchy food, such as bread, potato, rice, pasta, yam. Starchy foods give energy, fibre, vitamins and minerals.

- ★ Bread, try different types such as pitta bread, wraps or bread rolls.
- ★ Other starchy foods, such as pasta or rice.
- ✔ Whole grain varieties are best for fibre, which is vital for a healthy digestive system.

2. Meat and alternatives

Add some protein, for example meat, fish, eggs, beans or pulses. Protein foods build muscles and provide minerals.

- ★ Lean meats, such as chicken, turkey or ham.
- ★ Include oily fish, such as pilchards, sardines or mackerel at least once every three weeks.
- ★ Egg, such as quiche or omelette.
- ★ Meat alternatives, such as tofu or tempeh.
- ★ Dishes containing pulses, beans or meat, for example dahl, stew or bean salad.

❗ *Meat products such as sausage rolls, sausages and chipolatas, pies and pastries, fried foods should not be included more than once a fortnight.*

❗ *Use butter, margarine, mayonnaise or salad dressings sparingly, because these can be high in fat, or use lower fat alternatives.*

3. Milk and dairy products

Include a dairy product or dairy alternative, such as fromage frais or tzatziki. These foods provide calcium necessary for strong bones and teeth, as well as providing protein and vitamins.

- ✔ Lower fat varieties are healthier.

4. Fruit and vegetables

Include fruit and vegetables; fresh, frozen, tinned or dried. Fruit and vegetables are full of vitamins, minerals and fibre necessary for the body to function properly and to keep you strong and healthy.

- ★ Add tomato, lettuce or beetroot to a sandwich.
- ★ A vegetable dish, such as salad or roast vegetables.
- ★ Fresh fruit, such as apple, banana or pear.
- ★ Dried fruit, such as raisins, apricots or figs.
- ★ Fruit salad (fresh or tinned in juice) or vegetable salad.
- ★ Finger foods, such as cherry tomatoes, cucumber sticks or slices of pepper. (Good with a dip, such as houmous or guacamole).
- ✔ Use fresh fruit and vegetables, which are in season to help the environment and enjoy variety!
- ✔ Aim to include at least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetable or salad.

Drinks

Drinks, especially water, help children to concentrate and feel well.

- ★ We encourage water, milk or pure fruit juice, rather than sweetened juice, to be included in packed lunches.

Snacks and confectionary

Snack foods may be included occasionally but aim to make healthier choices. Snack foods tend to be high in fat, sugar and salt. Foods high in fat can cause excessive weight and may lead to heart disease. High sugar foods are high in calories and bad for teeth. High salt foods may increase blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease and cancers.

- ★ Replace sweets and chocolate with dried fruit, grapes or fruit salad.
- ★ Replace cakes and pastries with fruit bread, malt loaf or fruit bagel.
- ★ Replace savoury snacks with rice cakes, breadsticks or plain popcorn.
- ✘ Packed lunches should NOT contain chocolate, items containing chocolate, sweets, salted savoury snacks or crisp-like products.

Practical tips for a healthier lunchbox

- ★ Try to vary the contents of the lunchbox daily. That way you can ensure your child is getting the variety of nutrients their bodies need to function and grow.
- ★ Involve your child in preparing their lunchbox. They are more likely to enjoy food they have made themselves.
- ★ To keep food fresh, make sure it is stored properly: lunches packed the night before need to be stored in the fridge. If using rice, make sure it is cooled quickly and stored in the fridge overnight. To keep your lunch fresh during the day, use a cool bag and put in a frozen drink or reusable ice pack.
- ★ If your child refuses to eat brown bread, try a lighter variety or make sandwiches using a slice of white and a slice of wholemeal bread.
- ★ For variety, use pitta strips, crackers, bread sticks, or fruit and vegetable finger foods with a dip.
- ★ Always try to add a little salad to a sandwich. To avoid soggy sandwiches, dry the salad before adding it to the sandwich or put it in a separate sandwich bag or tub.
- ★ You can use leftovers; for example, rice and curry, vegetable pizza or pasta and sauce.
- ★ Make a salad using rice, potato or pasta from the night before, mixed with vegetables, beans and so on.

Useful websites

- i** www.healthylunch.org.uk
- i** www.schoolfoodplan.com
- i** www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/eatwell-plate.aspx

For more info about the onemedifund Eat Xavi initiative including healthier packed lunches and hot school lunches go to:

www.onemedifund.com/eatxavi