

# Tips for Packing School Lunches with a Healthy Punch



## Remember Food Safety

- Start with a warm up.** If you plan to pack soup or other hot entrees, use preheated insulated containers. To preheat, just fill with boiling water and let stand a few minutes before adding the hot food.
- Get the chills.** Surround your perishables with chilled items. Sandwich them between cold packs. Freeze bread, water bottles, 100% juice, or yogurt tubes to keep the inside of your lunch container cold until lunch time.
- Made in the shade.** Encourage your children to store their lunch boxes away from direct sun and any heating or cooling sources.
- No worries.** Pack items that aren't temperature sensitive to avoid the worry of unsafe bacterial growth. Pack small packets/cans of meat or fish and whole grain crackers for make it yourself mini sandwiches at the lunch table. Peanut butter, bread, bagels, and wraps, fruits, and veggies are all safe bets too.

## Cover the Basics

- Grains.** Make whole-grain bread, mini bagels, pita or tortillas the basis of healthy sandwiches. Pack in a container that keeps them from being squished or crumbled and fresh tasting.
- Fruits and vegetables.** Make fruits and veggies easy to munch by cutting them into bite-sized pieces. Choose fresh, dried or canned. Send along a small container of yogurt for dipping. Again, pay attention to packing to protect food from unappetizing bruises.
- Protein.** The standard PBJ is a great choice. If food allergies nix peanut butter, explore other protein-rich spreads for sandwiches. In addition to lean lunch meat, fish, beans, nuts, cheese and tofu are great protein sources for growing children.
- Calcium.** Send milk in a thermos or let your child purchase milk at school. If you child isn't a milk drinker, pack yogurt, cheese or fortified juices — all good sources of calcium.

## Keep it Fresh and Fun

- Shape up.** Cut sandwiches into fun shapes using cookie cutter to add pizzazz.
- Switch it up.** Instead of bread, sandwich your protein, veggies or fruit between crackers, rice cakes, bagels, pita pockets or tortillas.
- Put in the subs.** Try packing whole grain pasta or rice with sliced veggies and olives; peanut butter dip for fruit; dry cereal mixed with dried fruit and nuts, or yogurt with fruit and granola. Cube leftover chicken and pair it with grapes or bell pepper chunks on a toothpick for a tower of fun.

