



TIPS FOR PREPARING HEALTHY, AFFORDABLE LUNCHES
“Think Outside the Lunch Box”

PREPARATION

- Keep choices simple – Try low-sugar/salt peanut butter and jelly, tuna or cheese sandwich squares on whole wheat accompanied by a fresh fruit.
- Use shapes – Sandwiches in hearts, cheese in cubes, apples in circles – add fun to the lunch box.
- Try healthy substitutes:

Instead of:	Consider:
Fried chips and snacks	Jicama with lime juice, trail mix, low-salt/fat air popped popcorn, veggies & light dip, baked chips
Cookies and sweet snacks	Trail mix, yogurt, or low-sugar home-baked goodies such as oatmeal cookies or fruit muffins – or a stick of cheddar cheese. Prevents cavities!
Mayonnaise spread	Avocado spread

PLANNING

- Create a weekly lunch menu and add it to your shopping list. Look for bargains on healthy items - buy more and freeze for later.
- Prepare lunch on Sundays
 - Fill small containers with vanilla yogurt and frozen blueberries or strawberries; freeze. Pack in your child’s lunchbox. By lunchtime, it’s a delightfully cold, healthy treat.
 - Pack and freeze cups of green beans, peas or corn. These will thaw by lunchtime.
 - Pack low-salt, low-fat popcorn, low-salt pretzels, or whole-wheat crackers into containers to pack into the lunch box or bag later.
- Make double recipes of your healthy dinners and freeze the excess in single size portions for quick and healthy meals later in the week.
 - Just add a healthy side item, such as a bag of sliced green and red peppers for munching, and your child has a fun Friday lunch. Or, pack cold cooked pasta (in fun shapes) with a tasty light dressing to dip into.

GET THE KIDS INVOLVED

- Ask your children which fresh fruits and vegetables they’d like to try when you’re at the local farmer’s market or grocery store. Encourage them to be “food explorers.”
- Ask your children to help pack their own lunch. Kids love using their hands and helping. Give them simple tasks such as spreading avocado on the bread (instead of mayonnaise) or counting the grapes when dropping them into the bag.
- Pack identical lunches. What’s good for the kids is good for you and your budget. Let the kids choose a new weekly fruit or vegetable for you, too.
- Grow your own fruits or vegetables. It’s a great project and the kids will enjoy picking what they helped grow. Try cherry tomatoes and lettuce to start.

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FOOD PREPARATION AND STORAGE TIP SHEET

County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health

PREPARATION:

- Be aware of potentially hazardous foods – harmful bacteria prefer foods high in protein and moisture such as meat, fish, poultry, eggs and milk.
- Keep those foods cold, below 41 degrees, or hot, above 135 degrees.
- Clean counters, utensils and hands before preparing food.
- Wash lunch pails and thermoses with hot, soapy water. Rinse and air dry after each use.
- Throw away disposable bags and food wrappings (foil, wax paper, etc.) after each use.

STORAGE:

- Prepare potentially hazardous foods the night before, and refrigerate overnight.
- Pack a cold juice box or fruit in lunch to help keep potentially hazardous foods cold.
- Use insulated lunch box and/or pack a freezer ice pack.
- Use thermos appropriately – some are made specifically for hot or cold foods.
- Refrigerate empty thermos overnight with the lid off, and then add cold drink in the morning.
- To store soup, heat to gentle boil and put in thermos just before child leaves for school.
- Store lunch in cool, dry place – not under a pile of jackets or near a sunny window.
- Refrigerate lunch at school if possible.

AFTER EATING:

- Once foods from home or pre-packaged items are open, eat them or refrigerate promptly.
- If your child brings home half-eaten items, throw them out.

For more information, contact Ric Encarnacion in the Department of Environmental Health at (619) 338-2180, or visit <http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/deh/food/publications.html>.

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