

Pointers For Parents

Thinking Inside The Box: Packing A Healthy Lunch

(NAPSA)—If your children received a report card for the lunches they eat at school, what do you think their grades would be? When kids eat a packed lunch that is healthful and flavorful, from foods they've chosen, everybody goes to the head of the class. But, as in any other subject, getting an A+ in lunch involves a little homework.

Approach the lunchbox as a chance to help kids learn to make smart food choices. Involve them in the planning, says Roberta Duyff, registered dietitian and author of the *American Dietetic Association Complete Food and Nutrition Guide*.

"As a parent, it's up to you to decide what foods to offer and when," she explains. "Let your child choose foods from what you offer—and how much. For example, offer two to three choices for their packed lunch. For example, you might ask, 'Which fruit would you like with your lunch: a banana, an apple or a tangerine?'"

It's possible to present youngsters with lunch choices that are not only fun and tasty, but also healthful. For more fiber, make sandwiches with whole-grain bread, suggests Duyff. For an easy-to-eat sandwich, roll up turkey and chopped lettuce, or peanut butter and banana slices, or cheese and salsa in a flour tortilla. Fruit juice is a great take-along beverage choice; for better nutrition make sure it's really juice, not a fruit-flavored soda. If your kids choose juice to drink, offer them other milk-group foods as a source of calcium: cheese on a sandwich or a carton of yogurt.

Portion Control

"Be sensible about portions for kids. Adult-size portions aren't right for younger children, whose stomachs are smaller," adds Duyff. "Let your child's appetite guide how much to pack. If a child tosses or brings home part of his or her lunch, talk about why. Maybe you packed too much. The 'clean plate' or 'empty lunchbox'-



expectation may lead to overeating. Your child doesn't need to finish everything—if he or she feels full and is growing properly."

Finger Foods

Kids of all ages like finger foods. Sandwiches or tortilla roll-ups are a great place to start: just cut them into child-size pieces. Raw vegetables are colorful, crisp and healthful—and fun as finger foods, too. Let kids decide which veggies to take: sticks of crunchy cucumber or green zucchini; "coins" of yellow summer squash or orange carrots; or small grape or cherry tomatoes. Include a small container of ranch dressing, yogurt dip or salsa for veggie dipping. Whole-grain crackers, cheese cubes or string cheese, and small whole fruits are easy to handle, too!

10 Tips for A+ Lunches

Remember to take advantage of every eating event as an opportunity to help kids learn to eat well for a healthy life. These tips can help.

1. Set up a lunch center in your kitchen that's low enough for kids to reach. Even young children can put animal or graham crackers in plastic bags and help wash whole fruit for their lunchboxes.

2. Have your child help you plan and prepare his or her lunch the night before if mornings are hectic. Keep packed lunchboxes chilled in the refrigerator overnight.

3. Offer variety. Besides a protein-rich sandwich, yogurt or leftover chicken, include fruit and a raw vegetable. Snack foods such as chips or cookies provide little

nutritional value; offer them only once in a while.

4. Include a good-tasting source of calcium—cheese on a sandwich, a container of yogurt, or a packaged pudding. Dannon Danimals Lowfat Yogurt, a good source of both calcium and protein, is a great lunch or snack food that kids and moms can agree on.

5. Pack a dip, such as peanut butter for celery or carrot sticks, or yogurt or ranch dressing for raw veggies. Put it in a small, disposable plastic container with a lid, available at party supply stores.

6. Help your child keep perishable lunch foods safe to eat. Keep small chill packs in your freezer to tuck into the lunchbox to keep yogurt, milk, sandwiches and other foods made with meat, poultry, fish or eggs cold.

7. Think outside the lunchbox. If your child loved the tomato soup or bean chili you had for dinner, heat it in the microwave oven the next morning and pack it in a thermal container so it stays hot for lunch. Skip any heated, portable foods with meat, poultry, fish or eggs; they may not get or stay hot enough for food safety.

8. Encourage after-lunch physical activity with a handwritten note that says something like, "Now that you've enjoyed your lunch, go play catch!"

9. Follow more food safety. At school, remind your child to store his or her lunchbox in a cool and clean place, out of the sun. Teach your child to wash his or her hands with soap and water before eating; tuck in a moist hand-sanitizing hand wipe to clean hands after eating. Together make sure lunchboxes and food containers are washed with soap and water after every use.

10. Investigate other creative ways to get your kids to eat healthful foods. Browse kids' cookbooks at the library or the bookstore for great ideas. Or check out www.dannon.com for lots of nutrition information and great recipes kids will love.