

You all wanted it, and I am here to deliver. I have done some research on lunchbox ideas and have come up with the following suggestions that should keep your child's lunch exciting for the remainder of the school year! Full menu's are included, as well as "mix and match" ideas.

The lunchbox: It is important to have the right gear and the lunchbox is an important asset. Consider letting your child pick out his own lunchbox or purchase one and let him decorate it with paint or markers. Make sure your child's name is on it with a permanent marker or paint. Most schools will not provide a refrigerator to store lunchboxes, so you should select an insulated one with a re-usable freezer pack to keep the lunch fresh. Or, instead of using a freezer pack, you can freeze a bottle of water, and add it to the lunch box. It will keep the lunch cold and fresh during morning classes and by lunch time it will have thawed and be ready to drink.

More gear - containers: Those gimmicky, salt, fat and sugar-filled, "Lunchables" trays are very popular with kids. Not because they taste so good, but because look so cool. There is no reason a homemade lunch needs to look dull and unappetizing. Buy colorful containers in different shapes to pack your child's lunch. They are better than plastic bags and less wasteful too. If your child is drawn to characters, buy some stickers and decorate the containers. Put your child's name on the containers, but it is inevitable that some containers may not make their way home. Another option is to purchase inexpensive or "semi" disposable containers that will not disappoint you if they accidentally end up in the trash.

Talk to your child about lunchtime: Don't assume that your child's uneaten lunch is sign that he did not like the food. If you ask a few questions, you may find that your child does not have enough time to eat lunch or that he is spending more time socializing with his friends than actually chewing. Asking questions will give you the opportunity to help him learn other important skills such as managing his time and selecting times to socialize.

Don't forget about leftovers! Packing leftovers in your child's lunch can save you time and energy, and kids love them. When you're deciding what to cook for dinner, think about how you might incorporate leftovers into a lunch for the following day. Make a few extra servings for dinner and set them aside for the next day's lunch. Here are a few ideas for making it work:

- If you make chicken breasts, prepare an extra serving and slice it for sandwiches the next day instead of purchasing deli lunch meat.
- If you're making a salad for dinner, slice some extra vegetables, such as cucumbers, carrots, bell peppers, and celery, or make an extra undressed salad directly in the Laptop Lunch. (Make extra dressing and pour it into the dip container.)
- While you're making dinner, boil a few eggs. Pack the eggs whole, make deviled eggs, or use them in egg salad.
- Make extra pasta, couscous, or rice and make side salads for lunch by cutting up vegetables and adding salad dressing.
- Grill extra vegetables and use them in sandwiches.

Sandwich fillings: Try some of these sandwich fillings in whole-wheat pocket bread, on whole-grain bread, bagels, crackers, English muffins, rice cakes or rolls, or try filling and rolling tortillas or naan flat bread.

- Cheese, avocado, and sprouts
- Grilled cheese with cucumber or sprouts
- Leftover grilled vegetables (bell peppers, onions, mushrooms, eggplant, zucchini) with sliced cheese, goat cheese, or pesto sauce
- Cheddar or mozzarella cheese with apple slices
- Brie cheese with mustard and sprouts
- Cheese, tomato, sprouts or lettuce, and pesto sauce
- Leftover turkey loaf with tomatoes, and lettuce or sprouts
- Sliced leftover chicken or turkey, cranberry sauce, and lettuce
- Sliced leftover chicken or turkey, honey mustard, tomatoes, and lettuce or sprouts
- Sliced leftover beef with mayonnaise or horseradish, sliced tomato and cucumbers
- Chicken salad made with celery, lettuce, and tomato
- Tuna/cucumber/green pepper salad with tomato
- Salmon salad with lettuce or sprouts
- Lowfat cream cheese, and smoked salmon (with tomato, and red onion)

Offer plenty of choices: Provide small servings and many choices -- variety is a key to [healthy eating](#). Providing your child with plenty of variety is not hard or time consuming. Many lunch foods can be prepared, in advance, in large quantities. Each morning, simply fill up small containers with different foods.

Brown Bag Tips

- If you have to make a lot of sandwiches, try the assembly line method: Lay out slices of bread, spread each slice with butter, mustard, mayo or any other spread you are using. Go down the line and add toppings, finish with top slice of bread, then wrap.
- For easier spreading, freeze breads first, then make your sandwiches. This can also help keep foods chilled and it will be thawed in time for lunch.
- Use frozen ice packs to help keep cold foods cold. Freezing drinks like juices and iced teas can also help keep foods cold, and who doesn't prefer a cold drink (keep in mind that the containers are likely to sweat while thawing, so wrap your food well so it doesn't get soggy).
- For a nutritious and low calorie lunch, pack some raw, or lightly steamed (then chilled) vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower or carrots. Add a small container of dip (or individual package of salad dressing) and you've got a great snack or lunch addition.
- Hummus, whether used as a dip or a sandwich spread is a great addition to any lunchbox.
- Don't forget stuffed tomatoes! Stuff with tuna or egg salad or even potato, pasta or rice salad.
- A thermos can keep things hot as well as cold, which opens up a host of lunchtime possibilities. How about soups, or pastas or even stir-frys? A wide mouthed thermos container can be the brown bagger's best friend. Just fill with piping hot food and seal. It will stay hot until lunchtime.
- Tired of the same old sandwich? How about cold pizza for lunch?
- What's exotic for us is normal fare in Japan. Sushi Rolls make terrific lunchbox fare.
- Frittatas are great served cold and are perfect for packing in a lunchbox.
- Savory tarts, pies and quiches can often be served at room temperature and add an elegant touch to any box lunch.

Kid Friendly Feasts

- Core an apple and stuff the inside with sun butter. Top with raisins, nuts, sunflower seeds or toasted coconut. The filling will keep the cut apple from turning brown.
- Cream cheese and jelly sandwiches, or spread bread with cream cheese and top with dried fruits like raisins, apples or apricots.
- Mash a banana together with cream cheese and top with fresh apple, pineapple or peach slices.
- Pack fresh fruit with yogurt dip.
- Make fancy sandwiches by cutting shapes out of the bread with a cookie cutter (use the crusts and scraps to make breadcrumbs or croutons). Kids love the novelty and will be more apt to finish their lunch.

Here are five fast school lunch ideas that will work for kids of all ages:

1. Bagel with vegetable 'confetti'

Spread a bagel, use your child's favorite flavor, with plain cream cheese.

Then finely dice an array of sweet raw veggies such as red and yellow peppers and carrots. Sprinkle the veggies liberally over the bagel half.

Delicious!

2. Sushi rolls

Most kids LOVE California sushi rolls. The imitation crab meat is sweet, the cucumber crunchy, and the avocado makes it creamy.

If you prefer, you can roll the "crab meat," cucumber and avocado in a flour tortilla instead of the rice .

Cut into pieces as you would a regular sushi roll and wrap it tightly.

3. You can use the same roll or wrap technique above with salmon or tuna salad. Tortilla wraps are fun and easy!

4. Sneak some veggies or fruit into their sandwich. Kids generally like the taste of sweet fruit or veggies, but they don't like the thought or look of them.

Try slicing thin slices of pears or apples and adding them to sandwiches. It provides great crunch--and nutrients.

For a healthy dose of Vitamin A, puree some deliciously sweet winter squash (butternut, acorn etc.) and spread onto sandwich instead of processed mayonnaise.

5. Frito Pie

Take your favorite chili recipe, with or without meat, heat it through, and send it to school in a thermos with a cup top. In separate plastic bags, send along some baked tortilla chips and shredded Monterey jack or cheddar cheese. Have your children arrange some crumpled chips along the bottom of the thermos cup, then add shredded cheese and top with warm chili. The chili melts the cheese, and kids adore it!

Tuck these in a lunch box:

- Vegetable sticks with a small container of salad dressing for dipping
- Fresh fruit
- Pretzels
- Celery sticks filled with cream cheese or peanut butter and raisins
- Fruit yogurt
- Crackers--plain or with peanut butter or cheese
- Cheese sticks
- Graham crackers
- Fortune cookies
- Dried fruit
- Fruit leather
- Tortilla chips with a small jar of salsa
- Small bags of popcorn
- A note from you

Lunch Menu's:

Chicken salad cracker sandwiches
cheese sticks
cut grapes and strawberries

Sun butter stuffed celery sticks
yogurt
cereal snack mix

Rolled sliced low-fat ham
cheese squares
round crackers
box of raisins

rolled ham
raw veggie combo
dressing for dip

Tuna salad stuffed cherry tomatoes
cream cheese stuffed celery sticks
fruit salad Jell-O

ham-n-cheese mini-sub (sandwich on a hot dog bun)
goldfish and pretzels
fruit roll-ups

wrapped sandwiches
shredded salad (carrots, radishes, cabbage and
cucumber, with just enough favorite salad dressing to
stir & coat)
grapes

egg salad pita's
pretzel sticks in cheese cubes

sliced kiwi and strawberries

wrap a slice of turkey or ham around a cheese stick
yogurt
wheat crackers
craisins

Cold pasta salad with chicken chunks
cheese panini
honeydew chunks

Roll-up sandwich
Pasta salad
Fruit salad

Tuna sandwich
Cucumber chain
Sliced melon

Bean and cheese burrito
Sliced mango
Green salad w/dressing on side

Whole wheat pancakes
Hard boiled or poached egg
Maple syrup on side
Steamed yams

Sun butter and honey pocket sandwich
Steamed carrots and asparagus
Sliced apples

Half bagel w/cream cheese and smoked salmon
Pan cooked potatoes and herbs
applesauce

Here's a list of healthy lunch foods. Mix and match to see what combinations you can come up with.

Breads	Spreads & Condiments	Fillings	Fruits (Dried and Fresh)	
bagel baguette bread sticks crackers English muffin focaccia lavash bread pita bread pizza bread rice cakes rolls sandwich bread tortillas	almond butter apple butter avocado (mashed) banana (mashed) brie cheese cashew butter cream cheese (lowfat) goat cheese honey hummus jam (spreadable fruit) ketchup mayonnaise/mustard pesto pizza or tomato sauce pumpkin butter	carrots (shredded) cheese (lite/low-fat) chicken chicken salad egg salad hard boiled egg nitrite-free hot dogs lettuce shrimp salad sliced avocado sliced cucumber smoked salmon sprouts tofu tuna salad	apples apricots Asian pears avocado bananas blueberries cherries cranberries (dried) dates figs mango papaya pears prunes raisins	grapefruit grapes kiwi melon nectarines orange sections peaches pineapple plums raspberries strawberries tomatoes

Vegetables		Treats	Other	Other Grains
asparagus beets bell peppers bok choy broccoli Brussels sprouts cabbage carrots cauliflower celery cucumbers eggplant green beans green salad	lettuce mushrooms seaweed (nori, wakame, hijiki) shelling peas snap peas soy beans (edamame) spinach squash sweet potatoes yams zucchini	apple crisp applesauce baked chips with salsa dried fruit fruit bar fruit leather granola homemade cookies notes from home popcorn pretzels stickers trail mix vanilla yogurt/ fruit	baked tofu bean burrito cottage cheese with fruit garlic toast polenta with pizza sauce and cheese	pasta rice couscous oatmeal bulghar

