PLANNING AND PACKING HEALTHY LUNCHES

Whether you eat at home or away, you can make lunch an enjoyable, healthy meal. Get started with these tips.

Shop the Food Groups

For a healthy, balanced lunch, include foods from 2 or more of the 5 food groups. Look for these suggestions when you shop.

- **Fruits:** Fresh fruits, dried fruits, or fruits canned in 100% fruit juice make a nutritious lunchtime side or dessert.
- **Vegetables:** Fresh vegetables like lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, and onions are great for salads and sandwiches. Pick up carrots, celery, peppers, and cauliflower for a crunchy alternative to chips.
- **Grains:** Choose whole-grain breads, tortillas, and flatbreads for sandwiches, and whole-grain crackers to go with soups and chili.
- **Protein foods:** Look for lean deli meats (such as turkey, ham or beef), eggs, cans or pouches of tuna, salmon or sardines, hummus, peanut butter, and nut and seed butters.
- **Dairy:** Go for fat-free and low-fat milk and yogurt, and reduced-fat sliced cheeses and cheese sticks.
  - *Tip:* For convenience, buy pre-cut and washed produce and single-serving packages of foods like raisins, yogurt, and hummus. To save money, buy whole fruits and vegetables and foods in larger containers to prepare and portion out at home.

NO REFRIGERATOR? NO PROBLEM!

If your workplace or school doesn't have a fridge, pack non-perishable lunch options that don't need refrigeration.

Some ideas: Single-serving cans or pouches of tuna or salmon, peanut butter, nut butters (such as soy nut butter and almond butter), nuts, trail mix, whole-grain crackers, cherry tomatoes, whole fresh fruits, dried fruit, fruit canned in 100% fruit juice, and single-serving containers of shelf-stable, fat-free, and low-fat dairy milk or soy milk.

4 Fast Lunch Ideas

1. **Wrap Up Leftovers.** Fold last night's beans and rice, chili, stew, or chicken into a whole-wheat tortilla with lettuce, tomato, and reduced-fat cheese.

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TUNA APPLE SALAD SANDWICH

Makes: 4 servings

Liven up your lunch-time sandwich with a refreshing mix of tuna, apples, raisins, and walnuts. For a change of pace, enjoy the salad on a bed of lettuce with whole-grain crackers on the side.

Ingredients

- 1 apple (such as Fuji or pink lady)
- 1 can 12-oz chunk light tuna (drained)
- 2 tablespoons low-fat plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons reduced-fat mayonnaise
- ½ cup raisins (or chopped figs)
- ¼ cup chopped walnuts
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley (optional)
- ½ teaspoon curry powder (optional)
- 8 leaves lettuce (Bibb, romaine, green, or red leaf)
- 8 slices whole-grain bread

Directions

1. Cut apple in quarters; remove core and chop.
2. In a medium-size bowl, mix all salad ingredients, except tuna.
3. Gently fold in tuna.
4. Make sandwiches, using lettuce and whole-grain bread (toasted, if desired), and fill with tuna apple salad.

Adapted from: MyPlate Kitchen (ChooseMyPlate.gov).

2. **Jazz Up Your PB&J.** Try a new combo like sunflower seed butter and apple slices on whole-grain bread. For another sandwich idea, try the **Tuna Apple Salad Sandwich** recipe.
3. **Make it Mediterranean.** Spread hummus into a whole-wheat pita, then stuff with crumbled feta cheese, sliced cucumber and tomatoes, and a few chopped olives.
4. **Build a Yogurt Parfait.** Top low-fat Greek yogurt with granola or whole-grain cereal, fresh or dried fruit, and nuts or seeds. If you're brown-bagging it, pack the yogurt and toppings in separate containers or resealable bags, along with an ice pack, and assemble at lunchtime.

Safe Lunch Packing for Perishable Foods

Follow these tips to keep perishable foods safe and fresh until lunchtime.

- Before you prepare your lunch, wash your hands with soap and water. Make sure countertops and cooking utensils are clean.
- Make your lunch in the evening and refrigerate or freeze overnight so it's well chilled when you head out the door.
- To keep foods cold, pack your lunch in an insulated lunch bag with 2 cold sources, such as an ice pack and a frozen bottle of water or 100% juice.
- Bring hot foods like soup and chili to a boil, then pack in an insulated container or thermos.
- When possible, store your lunch in a refrigerator as soon as you arrive at your destination and keep it there until you are ready to eat.
- Throw away any perishable foods, including leftovers, eggs, meat, poultry, salads, and dairy products, that do not get eaten at lunchtime. Do not repack those foods for lunch the next day.
- Thoroughly wash reusable containers and utensils with hot, soapy water between uses.

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