



Lunches to go

Lunch is an important part of your child's day. Eating a variety of nutritious foods while at school helps your child get the energy and nutrients they need to:

- Learn during the day
- Support their growth and development

Offer your child a variety of:

- vegetables and fruits including fresh, frozen and canned
- whole grains like whole grain pasta and bread, oats, barley, brown rice and quinoa
- protein foods such as beans, peas, lentils, nuts and seeds, tofu, meat, fish, poultry, eggs and dairy products

Water, chilled plain milk or fortified soy beverages are all nutritious drink choices. Pack a reusable water bottle so your child can refill it during the day.

Trust your child's appetite to guide them on how much to eat. It's normal for your child to eat more on some days than others. Know that sometimes food may come back uneaten from school. If this happens often, have a conversation to learn why.

Involve your child

Include your child in planning, shopping, preparing and packing lunches to:

- Make them feel a part of the process
- Teach them food skills
- Support them to try new foods
- Decrease the amount of food that comes home uneaten

Plan ahead

When you can, offer your child choices about the foods they want in their lunch. Ask them "Would you like a sandwich or leftovers? An apple or a banana? Yogurt or cheese cubes?"

- Plan what foods you will offer as school lunches for the week
- Leftovers make great lunches. Keep this in mind when you're making dinner
- Prepare some foods ahead to save time. Boil a few more eggs, cut up extra fruit and vegetables, or make a double batch of stew or muffins to freeze for later
- Stock up on grab and go snacks such as apples and bananas that you can easily add to the main meal
- Pack lunches the night before if mornings are busy

Limit highly processed foods

Packaged foods such as granola bars, snack kits and processed meats can be convenient but tend to be higher in sugar, sodium and saturated fat. If you buy these foods, offer them less often and in smaller quantities. Use the nutrition facts table to compare products:

- Look at the percent daily value (%DV) for sugar, sodium and saturated fat and choose the product with lowest %DV
- Generally, 5%DV or less is "a little" and 15%DV is "a lot"

Instead of deli meats, fill sandwiches with these options:

- Canned tuna or salmon
- Egg salad
- Nut or seed butters
- Cheese slices
- Hummus or bean spreads
- Leftover cooked chicken or beef

Regularly eating processed meats like ham, turkey, salami, bologna, hot dogs and pepperoni sticks has been linked to a higher risk of colorectal cancer.

Lunch ideas

Finger foods

- [Hummus](#) with cut-up veggies and whole wheat pita triangles
- Apple slices, [zucchini muffin](#) and seed butter (e.g. sunflower seed butter)
- Strips of [French toast](#) with yogurt and fruit puree
- Veggie sticks, edamame, brown rice crackers and yogurt-based dip
- Whole grain pita or tortilla chips with [bean dip](#) and [guacamole](#)
- Cherry tomatoes, cheese cubes, and trail mix with any of the following: whole grain cereal, air-popped popcorn, seeds, dried fruit, and coconut

Sandwiches

- Falafel, plain or flavoured [hummus](#)
- [Egg salad](#) or [chickpea salad](#)
- Diced chicken chunks and chopped seedless grapes
- Marinated tofu or tempeh slices
- Black beans and cheese

Add any of the following veggies: tomato, cucumber, pepper strips or onion slices; grated or shredded carrot, cabbage, or lettuce; roasted veggies.

Add extra moisture to sandwich fillings by using any of the following: mayonnaise, non-hydrogenated margarine, pesto or mustard.

As a change from bread, try tortilla, flat bread, pita, rice cakes, crackers, melba toast, chapatti, roti or bannock. Choose whole grain products if available.

Hot lunch ideas

- [Minestrone soup](#) and a roll
- [Chili](#) and cornbread
- [Veggie and tofu stir fry](#) with brown rice
- [Chickpea curry](#) and naan
- [Macaroni and cheese with veggies](#)
- Perogies and [shredded cabbage salad](#)
- [Meatballs](#) with spaghetti or rice
- Venison or [moose stew](#) with bannock
- [Congee](#) (rice porridge) and gai lan (Chinese broccoli)
- [Dahl](#) (lentil stew) with carrots and brown rice
- [Oatmeal](#) made with milk and apples

Cold lunch ideas

- Homemade [quesadilla](#) with salsa
- [Whole grain pancakes](#) or waffles with fruit and yogurt
- Whole grain cereal with milk and fruit
- [Vietnamese salad rolls](#)
- [English muffin pizza](#) with tomato sauce, sliced vegetables and grated cheese
- [Cranberry oat muffin](#) with ricotta cheese and peach slices
- [Bulgur](#), [quinoa](#) or [barley](#) salad with cubes of chicken and diced veggies
- Nori rolls or sushi bowl with rice, cucumber, carrot, sweet bell pepper, avocado, and tofu strips

Vegetable and fruit sides

- Veggie sticks and [bean dip](#)
- Veggie or [fruit kebabs](#)
- Strawberries or other fruit pieces dipped in yogurt
- [Fruit salad](#)
- Fruit and yogurt [smoothie](#)
- [Yogurt parfait](#)
- [Greek salad](#)

- [Fruit salsa and cinnamon crisps](#)
- [Eggplant dip](#) and pita chips

Grab and go snacks

- Fruit such as bananas, apples, oranges
- [Pumpkin muffin](#)
- No-bake [granola bar](#) or [energy bites](#)
- Plain yogurt cups
- Trail mix
- Whole grain crackers and cheese
- Applesauce

How to pack a safe lunch

- Keep cold foods cold. Use an insulated bag with a freezer pack or a chilled thermos to keep food and drinks cool
- Keep hot food hot. Use a thermos to pack hot foods. Pre-heat the thermos with hot water before filling
- Wash all fresh fruit and vegetables, even if they will be peeled
- Wash lunch containers and water bottles every night
- Throw out or compost perishable food that returns home at the end of the day

Be allergy aware

Some schools have rules about the types of foods that can be brought to the classroom to protect students with severe food allergies. For example, they may restrict peanuts and nuts. Speak with school staff to learn about allergy guidelines in your school.

For more information, visit [Peanut and Nut Aware Lunches and Snacks \(Northern Health Authority\)](#)

Recipe inspiration

- Canada's food guide: Food guide kitchen <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/eating-support/kitchen.html>
- Dietitians of Canada: Cookspiration <https://www.cookspiration.com/>