

Preparing School Lunches

By: Kristin Ritter, Holistic Health Coach

If you are anything like me, thinking about prepping for school lunches can bring up some drama around what your kids will eat, what you are okay with them eating and the delicate balance in between. After all, kids spend about 60% of their time in school and without a proper diet, rich in nutrient-dense whole foods, their capacity for learning dramatically decreases. As a parent, it is one of my top concerns each morning to pack a well-balanced lunch to fuel my little man for his day. The good news is that with proper planning, you can make your mornings a breeze while packing healthy lunches your kids will love.

The planning starts with the container. My son Liam and I just went out to buy him a backpack and cooler for first grade. Liam was all about the character on the cover and I was all about the size of the cooler (thankfully, we found his favorite Sonic character!). After a year of arguing over what he will eat because all the other kids had colorful packages of chips and snacks while he had tomatoes and carrots- I knew I was not going to give in and I could make his lunch appealing and healthy at the same time.

To make this a really cool lunch for Liam, while keeping it easy for me each morning, I had to find the right container. Plastic bags work just fine, but environmentally, I did not want contribute to the waste. I wanted a reusable container that separated the foods, as he (and most kids) like them to be. I found containers that come in three parts called Bento boxes... genius. They are BPA free, come in fun colors and use one lid, a parent's dream. The only problem was that the new bento box did not fit into Liam's current ninja cooler. Luckily, this year I was delighted to see the coolers got longer and are perfect for my new compartmentalized packs.

Now we have to figure out what to fill these 3 empty container spaces with for the entire school year. I could pack the ideal lunch that I want Liam to eat or I could pack the lunch I know he will eat- this is where the delicate balance comes in. I believe it helps to have a variety of foods you know your child will eat and involve them in the process of selecting those foods.

This is where listening to your kids and watching the foods they naturally gravitate to comes into play. Of my choices, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, hummus, pita, cheese,

shredded chicken, melon, even raw broccoli (so proud) are among his favorites. He also loves packaged chips, chocolate, pretzels, candy and crackers when he can get hold of these lovely treats. In the interest of balance, these now become the treats I can throw in his box on occasion with a fun note! To get new ideas, get your kids involved by taking them to the store (staying on the perimeter of the store where the healthier stuff is) and then have them jump in and help with making the lunches. If you're too grumpy in the mornings (like in my case) then pack lunch together the night before as a way to spend time and wind down.

KEY TAKE-AWAY'S:

1. Container is key- make it easy- when it all fits in the adorable lunch pack, it all clicks!
2. Listen to your child and watch what they actually like to eat and embrace the natural items, give in every so often to the not so good ones (still working on this one).
3. Take your kids shopping with you (and try your best to stay on the perimeter of the store)
4. Pack lunches together for some nice bonding time!

SOME EASY IDEAS FOR BREAKFAST, LUNCH AND SNACKS

BREAKFAST IDEAS

- Parfaits – Fruit, low-fat Yogurt, Granola
- Smoothies – Soooooo many options and ways to hide good stuff that kids just won't eat
- Pumpkin Whole-Grain Protein Pancakes
- Old-fashioned Oatmeal topped with Fruit, Protein and Nuts
- Egg Whites or One Egg with Frozen Veggies (Spinach or Broccoli) and Feta Cheese
- Chocolate Pudding, Sliced Bananas, Vanilla Yogurt mixed with Protein

LUNCH IDEAS

- Kid-sized Veggie Pizza and a side of Apple Sauce
- Veggie Burgers with Sweet Potato Fries
- Kids Garden Plate full of Greens, Carrots, Tomatoes and Peppers
- Whole Grain Bread with Organic Peanut Butter, Jam, Banana Slices and a side of Raisins
- Wholegrain Bread with Almond Butter and sliced Bananas
- Leftovers on a Wrap or Lettuce Wrap



SNACK IDEAS

- A Smoothie frozen in an Ice Pop Maker Mold (here are fun recipes)
- Oatmeal Raisin Cookies (homemade)
- Toasted Pumpkin Seeds
- Apple Slices or Rice Cakes with Organic Peanut Butter or Almond Butter
- Bite-sized Tofu Cubes
- Pita Chips or Baby Carrots with Hummus
- Granola and Yogurt
- Baked Sweet Potato Fries
- Avocado, Tomatoes and Mozzarella Cheese
- Fresh Soybeans (Edamame)
- Graham Crackers or Gingersnaps dipped in Apple Sauce
- Homemade Zucchini or Blueberry Muffins
- Nuts & Dried Fruits
- Tortilla Chips with Bean Dip
- Cucumber Slices with Cream Cheese
- Fruit and Cheese Kabobs
- Snack Bars such as Clif ZBars or Clif ZFruit

Just a warning though, once you master the art of packing healthy lunches your kids will love, other parents just might ask you to pack their kid's school lunches too! Be prepared to share your tips or roll up your sleeves and get packing! As always stay well and enjoy the journey!

Eat well and remember, you are what your food eats!

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