

## LUNCHBOX IDEAS

Diet plays an important part in every stage of our life, and even more so when we are in the process of rapid growth and development. It's a challenge not to succumb to convenience items in a time-driven society, such as crisps, fizzy drinks, chocolate bars and sweets commonly found in lunchboxes. This type of refined diet is high in sugar, salt, the wrong fats, artificial additives and low in fibre and vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids – all vital ingredients to build a healthy body and mind.

It's a good idea to get children involved in making their own lunchboxes. Never rigidly enforce views onto kids but talk about why unprocessed whole foods are necessary for good health. Explain that scientists are finding new compounds in fruit and vegetables every year and that these can help protect us from disease. Ask them to read the ingredient labels when shopping.

Ensure kids have access to fresh drinking water at school and are encouraged by teachers to top up their internal 'water supply' which improves concentration and immunity. Some schools are introducing a vending machine called the Green Machine. It offers healthier snacks and drinks (Tel. 020-8971-0055).

Above all, try not to get discouraged when offering new foods or suggesting items they have previously disliked. Research shows that parents who don't give up trying are more likely to be successful. Peer pressure can be a real problem as it's one of the most powerful influences on human behaviour. So, the more all of us encourage children to eat healthier snacks, the easier it will become.

Here are some ideas to play with:

- **Fillers for wholemeal bread or pitta bread pockets** include home-cooked beef, chicken, turkey, poultry or fish, hummus, tahini, falafal (chickpea balls), cheese or eggs combined with a salad topping such as spinach leaves, chinese leaves, grated carrot etc. Combinations are endless. Avoid commercial luncheon meats as they are loaded with fat, sugar, salt and nitrites.
- **Leftover pasta, rice, millet, potatoes or quinoa** from the night before can be made into a tasty grain salad for school. Simply combine with a protein source (beans, tofu, seeds, egg, fish, meat) and add green leafy salad varieties, grated, chopped or sliced vegetables, and a home-made dressing (mix extra virgin olive oil with lemon juice and garlic, a little pepper and bouillon powder and fresh/dried herbs such as dill - you can add balsamic vinegar, tahini, tomato paste or soy sauce for variety).
- **As a sweet**, fresh washed fruit is best (satsumas, pears, peaches, apples, grapes, cherries). These are also easy to carry around – healthy fast food “on the go”.
- **Make a fruit salad:** buy a can of fruit salad sweetened with apple or grape juice, add chopped fruit of your choice and a little fresh orange or tangerine or apple juice. Jazz it up with some linseeds, pecan nuts and coconut flakes from health food stores.
- **Home-made** low-sugar oatmeal raisin biscuit or flapjack
- **Pistachio nuts**, muesli bars, banana chips, home-made popcorn
- **Yoghurt** or crème fraiche with chopped fruit
- **For a savoury snack**, try roasting pumpkin seeds or sunflower seeds in the oven to bring out their flavour and sprinkle with a little seasalt.
- **Cut carrots**, celery and red, green or yellow peppers into strips for dunking into hummous, tahini or guacomole.
- **A bottle of filtered water** (still) – you can add some fruit juice (without sugar or sweeteners) or a slice of lemon.