

News from the Nurse

March is National Nutrition Month

Make Smart Choices When It Comes to Prepackaged Food

Prepackaged lunches for kids are popular and convenient, but they're also expensive and can be less than nutritious. Instead, create your own packable lunch using healthier ingredients. Consider these components and pack them in plastic containers, re-sealable plastic bags, or colorful plastic wrap:

- ½ cup nuts, sunflower seeds, chickpeas, or edamame (soy beans in the pod)
- cold-cut roll ups (lean turkey, ham, or roast beef; lower-fat cheeses; tofu and flour tortillas)
- cold pizza (shredded mozzarella cheese; pizza sauce; flour or corn tortilla, English muffin, or mini pizza shell)
- cracker sandwiches (whole-grain crackers filled with cream cheese or peanut butter and jelly)
- peanut butter and celery sticks
- veggie sticks with low-fat dip, hummus or dressing
- 100% fruit juice box and water is just as important to help flush toxins and stay hydrated
- optional dessert (choose one): flavored gelatin, pudding, oatmeal raisin cookie, graham crackers, or fresh fruit

Try to involve your kids in the process of making lunches together so that healthier eating can become a goal they can strive for and teaches them these good tips.

Safe Packing

A packed lunch carries the added responsibility of keeping the food safe to eat. That means keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold. One study found that less than a third of parents included a cold pack when packing yogurt, deli-meat sandwiches, and other foods that need refrigeration.

Here are some suggestions to keep foods safe when packing your child's lunches:

- wash your hands first.
- use a thermos for hot foods.
- use cold packs or freeze some foods and drinks overnight. They'll thaw in the lunch box.
- wash out lunch boxes every day or use brown paper lunch bags that can be discarded or recycled.
- toss in some moist towelettes to remind kids to wash their hands before eating - and to clean themselves up afterward.

Eating right doesn't have to be complicated — simply begin to shift to healthier food and beverage choices. These recommendations from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* can help get you started.

- Emphasize fruit, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat milk products.
- Include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, lentils, eggs and nuts.
- Make sure your diet is low in saturated fats, trans fats, salt (sodium) and added sugars.

Resources: - www.kidshealth.org; www.eatright.org

Make Your Calories Count

Think nutrient-rich rather than "good" or "bad" foods. The majority of your food choices should be packed with vitamins, minerals, protein, fiber and other nutrients, and lower in calories. Making smart food choices can help you stay healthy, manage your weight and be physically active.

Focus on Variety

Eat a variety of foods from all the food groups to get the nutrients your body needs. Fruits and vegetables can be fresh, frozen or canned. Eat more dark green vegetables such as leafy greens, spinach, broccoli and orange vegetables including carrots and sweet potatoes. Vary your protein choices with fish, chicken, beans, lentils, peas, tofu and nuts. Eat at least 3 ounces of whole-grain cereals, breads, crackers, quinoa, spelt, rice or pasta every day.

Know Your Fats

Look for foods low in saturated fats and trans fats to help reduce your risk of heart disease. Most of the fats you eat should be monounsaturated and polyunsaturated oils. Check the [Nutrition Facts](#) on food labels for total fat and saturated fat.

