

Healthy lunchbox

Although it is not mandatory in the UK, many schools have adopted healthier lunchbox policies, which have been shared with parents and carers to encourage healthy eating in school. These are usually based upon the principles of the Eatwell Guide, encouraging a lunchbox to include:

- a portion of starchy food such as potatoes, bread, rice, pasta or other starchy carbohydrates
- plenty fruit and vegetables;
- a portion of beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat or other proteins;
- a portion of dairy or calcium fortified dairy alternatives;
- a drink, e.g. water, semi-skimmed milk or 1% are healthy options.

Many schools also state that foods high in fat, salt and sugars are not allowed (such as crisps, confectionary and sugary carbonated drinks). These policies are part of whole school food approach to healthy food.

What should be in a healthy lunchbox?

The British Nutrition Foundation has created a [video](#) to help you understand how to put together a healthy, balanced lunchbox. Eating a healthy, balanced lunch is important to make sure children get the nutrients and energy to see them through the school day. The key to a healthy packed lunch is variety and getting the right balance of foods to provide children with all of the nutrients they need to stay healthy. A packed lunch made at home can be a healthy and delicious choice and gives you control over the foods and drinks included.

A school lunchbox should:

1. Be based on starchy foods

- This can include potatoes, bread, pasta, rice, couscous, wraps, pitta and chapatti. Where possible choose wholegrains or other high fibre varieties such as wholemeal bread and potatoes with the skins on.

2. Include plenty of fruit and vegetables

- Include at least 1-2 portions and vary these throughout the week.
- You could add sliced vegetables into a pasta dish or sandwich.
- You could also include packs of chopped fresh fruits or individual packs of dried fruits. Dried fruit can stick to teeth, which may lead to tooth decay, so it's best to keep dried fruit to mealtimes and not give them as snacks.

3. Include a portion of beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat, a dairy food and/or a non-dairy source of protein

- Use beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other sources of protein as sandwich fillings or in a salad.
- If you're not including a dairy food in the main lunch item (e.g. in a salad or sandwich), add a yogurt or some cheese, such as a Cheddar stick, to the lunchbox.
- If you're including a dairy alternative, e.g. soya yogurt or milk, choose varieties which are unsweetened and fortified with calcium.

4. Include a drink

- Healthy options include water, semi-skimmed or 1% milk.
- You could also give your child fruit juice or smoothie – but remember, fruit juice and smoothies should be limited to a combined total of 150ml a day.

Breaktime snacks and healthier treat alternatives

Although some cakes and savory snacks may be allowed by your child's school policy, these should be included less often and it is a good idea to select healthier options where possible. Check what the school policy allows when it comes to snacks or healthier treat alternatives. Below are some ideas for healthier breaktime snacks.

- Whole or sliced fruit.
- Vegetable sticks, e.g. celery, carrot, pepper, cucumber. Some vegetables are naturally baton shaped which can save you time preparing, for example, sugar snap peas and baby corn.
- Bag of plain popcorn.
- Malt loaf or a teacake
- Bread sticks.
- Unsalted nuts (check your child's schools policy on nuts first as some schools do not allow nuts to be brought in).
- Rice or corn cakes.

School meals

It may be worth considering whether your child could have a school meal as meals served in schools in the UK (with the exception of some academies) have to comply with regulatory standards for the foods provided and it is often easier to get the essential nutrients children need into a cooked meal than into a packed lunch.

For more information on healthy lunchboxes go to <https://bit.ly/2gyP4ri>