

**Eat better, start better**

# Healthy packed lunches for early years

A practical guide for parents and carers

A healthy lunch every day will give your child the energy and nutrients they need to grow, develop and learn. Early years settings are improving the food they provide and how they encourage children to eat healthily, and they need your support.

The key to a balanced, nutritious diet is variety. This leaflet provides you with some ideas of what to include to ensure that your children's packed lunch is healthy, balanced and nutritious.

A healthy, balanced and nutritious packed lunch should include foods from the following four food groups:



## Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

These foods provide carbohydrate to give your child energy for the afternoon.



## Fruit and vegetables

These foods provide vitamins and minerals to help protect against illness.



## Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

These foods provide protein, iron and zinc to help your child grow.



## Dairy and alternatives

These foods are a good source of calcium, for strong bones and teeth.



## Foods and drinks high in saturated fat, sugar (and/or salt)

Try to limit these types of food and drink. Too much salt and saturated fat can increase the risk of some illnesses in later life while too much sugar can damage children's teeth.



# More healthy packed lunch ideas

Name:

Class:

Each day a healthy packed lunch should include:



## A portion of starchy food

White or wholegrain bread, rolls, pitta bread or wraps, plain naan bread, bagels, cooked pasta, rice, noodles, couscous or potato as a salad.



## At least one portion of fruit and/or vegetable

Fresh, frozen, canned or dried, these can all count towards 5-A-DAY.

**Vegetables:** carrot, cucumber, pepper or celery sticks, tomatoes, grated carrot in sandwiches or wraps, sweetcorn, peas or pulses in salad.

**Fruits:** sliced apple or melon, plums, grapes, strawberries, kiwi, satsumas, chunks of pineapple, or dried fruit.



## A portion of beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

Sliced meat, chicken, fish; sliced egg in sandwiches, rolls or wraps, meat alternatives such as tofu or pulses like kidney beans and chickpeas in salads.



## A portion of milk or dairy foods

Yoghurt or fromage frais, cheese in sandwiches or wraps, whole milk (for children aged one to two) or semi-skimmed (for children aged two and over).

**A drink** – to help with hydration and concentration.

- ✔ **Water** – is the best choice.
- ✔ **Milk** – use whole milk (for children aged one to two) or semi-skimmed (for children aged two and over).
- ✔ **Avoid** fruit juice (even diluted fruit juice).
- ✔ **Avoid** squash, fizzy drinks, and flavoured water even if labelled 'sugar free', 'no added sugar' or 'reduced sugar'. These can contribute to tooth decay and have little nutritional value.

**Desserts, cakes, biscuits and crisps:** these foods are high in saturated fat, sugar and salt – too much of these foods can be harmful to health.

- ✔ Try to make desserts, puddings and cakes with fruit or milk, such as a yoghurt and fruit, or rice pudding.
- ✔ Limit confectionery such as chocolate, sweets or cereal bars to help protect your child's teeth.
- ✔ Avoid salty snacks such as crisps. Replace with plain breadsticks.





For more ideas on  
healthy packed lunches visit:  
[actionforchildren.org.uk](http://actionforchildren.org.uk)

## Example packed lunch menu

Provide a variety of foods from each of the food groups listed on the front page across each week. A week's packed lunch menu might look like this:

**Mon**

Tuna and sweetcorn pasta salad with red pepper sticks  
Apple slices and plain yoghurt  
Water to drink

**Tue**

Chicken and potato with salad  
Ginger biscuits with satsumas  
Milk to drink

**Wed**

Cheese salad wrap  
Banana and raisins  
Water to drink

**Thu**

Egg salad sandwich  
Seasonal fruit salad with fromage frais  
Milk to drink

**Fri**

Chickpea vegetable couscous salad  
Mixed berries  
Milk to drink



## Practical tips for healthy, safe and tasty packed lunches

**Communicate with your setting about your child's packed lunch.**

- Inform your setting of food allergies or intolerances.
- Check if your setting has a food policy.
- Ask how they store food. If they don't have a fridge, use a cool bag and a frozen bottle of water or reusable ice pack.

**Choosing foods**

- Vary lunchbox contents for a good balance of nutrients.
- Seasonal fruits and vegetables add colour, texture and are often cheaper and tastier.
- Read food labels. Look out for the colour coded nutrition information on the front of packets. Remember the more green(s) on the label, the healthier the choice.

**Preparing the packed lunch**

- Include your child in shopping, choosing and preparing what goes in their lunchbox, giving them choices within the food groups.
- Wash fruit and vegetables, and remove any stones.
- Keep it fresh. Rinsing slices of apple in dilute lemon juice, for example, will stop the slices from turning brown.
- Think sustainably. Use containers and cutlery that can be washed and used again.
- Label your child's packed lunch with their name.



# Eat better, start better

## Is your child starting school soon?

Find out what Universal Free School Meals mean for your child

### Don't forget to try school dinners

Since September 2014 every infant (aged 5-7) in England is now entitled to a free, healthy and nutritious school lunch.

### What does this mean for me?

If you have a child in reception or Year 1 or 2, you no longer need to pay for school meals or provide a packed lunch. This could save you approximately £400 per year.

### How do I know the lunch is healthy?

All schools have to meet the new school food standards. This means that the food will be healthy and nutritious.

### How do I register my child?

Just make sure your child is signed up. Contact the school for further details.

For more information on Universal Infant Free School Meals visit  
[www.actionforchildren.org.uk/eatbetterstartbetter](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/eatbetterstartbetter)

**HOW**

**ACTION FOR  
CHILDREN**

**WORKS**

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Registered charity nos:  
England and Wales 1097940.  
Scotland SC038092.  
Company no. 4764232.

This publication was developed with funding  
from Medway Council to improve the health  
of under 5s.

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17/18 003

