

## Healthy Measures: What's in your child's lunch bag?

On average, many children consume too much fat, sugar and salt and not enough vegetables, fruit or whole grain foods. Unhealthy lunches at school may be contributing to poor eating habits.

**The next time you pack your child's lunch, keep the following tips in mind:**

1. **Involve your children** in planning what to pack for lunch. Use [Canada's Food Guide](#) to show children how much of each food group they need for a healthy diet. Include three out of four food groups in every lunch.
2. **Don't cave** to your kids requests for pre-packed commercial lunches. These lunches miss many of the food groups and are often very high in salt, sugar and fat and low in fibre. Instead, use a plastic container to pack your own food. Include whole grain crackers or bread, low fat cheese and fruit, or soft whole grain tortillas, lean meat, salsa and lettuce to make a taco.
3. If you include lunch meats, and are seeking those that are preservative-free, **don't fall for the natural varieties**. These contain celery extract which is naturally high in nitrates. Nitrates, whether they come from vegetable or synthetic sources, have the potential to form cancer-causing nitrosamines. A healthier alternative would be to plan ahead and make roast chicken, beef or pork for dinner and use the leftovers to make sandwiches that you can freeze and pull out first thing in the morning.
4. **Can the pop!** One can of pop has 9-12 teaspoons of sugar. Purchase 100 per cent juice rather than pop, cocktail, drink or "ade". You could also join the school milk program which will ensure cold milk every day.
5. **Remember that treats aren't the enemy!** Although not an everyday fare, an occasional one packed in a lunch can be a nice surprise. A treat doesn't always have to be food! Surprise your child with a note inside the lunchbox - a riddle, rhyme or even a reminder of a fun event coming up.
6. Last but not least, before packing any food in the lunch bag, **always read the food labels** and be sure that ingredients do not contain nuts or peanuts.

Start the day with a healthy breakfast. Skipping breakfast or eating something like a doughnut will not provide the energy they need for the day and can also affect their grades.

Finally, end the day as well as you started it. If your child is successful in trading away their whole-grain sandwich for their friend's cake, make sure what is on the dinner plate makes up for it!

**For more information:**

[Nutrition Matters: Packing Healthy School Lunches](#)

[Nutrition Matters: Snacks that Make the Grade](#)

**Do you have questions on nutrition and healthy eating?** Contact *EatRight Ontario* at 1-877-510-5102 to speak to a Registered Dietitian.