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PAMPHLET

HEALTHY LUNCH BOXES

It's not always easy to pack a well-balanced lunch. Lack of time and ideas can make for boring lunches. This pamphlet is intended mainly as a tool to help parents optimize the quality and variety of foods in lunch boxes.



CONTENTS OF A HEALTHY LUNCH BOX

- > A lunch box should contain foods from each of the four food groups listed in *Canada's Food Guide*:
- > **Vegetables and Fruit** as well as **Grain Products** are rich in carbohydrates (quick source of energy for the body and brain) and contain vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre.
- > **Milk and Alternatives** contain carbohydrates and protein, in addition to providing calcium and vitamin D, which are essential for healthy bones and teeth.
- > **Meat and Alternatives** are rich in protein, which help us feel fuller longer and help build bone, muscle and other tissues.
- > When buying groceries, make sure to check the ingredient list as well as the Nutrition Facts Table on packages and labels:
 - Avoid, as much as possible, products in which sugar is the first ingredient listed. (Other names for sugar include sucrose, fructose, dextrose, glucose-fructose, invert sugar, malt syrup or corn syrup.)
 - Avoid, as much as possible, products that contain saturated or hydrogenated fats (trans fats), such as shortening, hydrogenated oil, lard, tallow, palm or palm kernel oil.
- > Make sure that foods are not only nutritious but tasty and colourful, and have an interesting texture as well. Pay special attention to the recipes used and enhance the flavour of foods with seasoning (e.g. herbs, spices, lemon juice, onion or garlic powder).
- > Opt for unprocessed foods as much as possible, because the less processed a food is, the more nutritious it is. For example, a raw, unpeeled apple contains more dietary fibre than unsweetened applesauce or apple juice.
- > **When preparing lunches, make sure to comply with school guidelines concerning allergies, acceptable foods and containers.**

For more information on food allergies, please consult the following Web sites:

- > www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/consommation/qualitedesaliments/allergiesalimentaires
- > www.aqaa.qc.ca

LUNCH BOX TIPS AND TIME SAVERS

- > Make a weekly lunch plan before going grocery shopping.
- > Prepare foods that go into the lunch box ahead of time to make them easier to use (e.g. wash and cut raw vegetables).
- > Make a few extra servings for dinner and use leftovers for lunch the next day.
- > Prepare meals ahead of time and freeze individual servings.
- > Set aside a section of the pantry, refrigerator and freezer for lunchbox foods and dishes, in order to cut down on prep time.
- > Encourage young people to participate in the preparation of their own lunches.

Below are some tips for packing variety and nutrition into healthy lunch boxes. At a certain time during the week, it may be challenging to prepare a healthy lunch box consisting of the foods that young people prefer. The goal is to include something from each of the four food groups, especially the foods listed below.

RECOMMENDED FOODS FROM EACH OF THE FOUR FOOD GROUPS

Vegetables and Fruit

- Raw vegetables: carrots, peppers, broccoli, turnip, snow peas, celery, cucumber, cauliflower, etc.
- Lettuce and spinach
- Vegetable juice
- Fresh fruit: apples, oranges, kiwis, clementines, bananas, strawberries, blueberries, cantaloupes, cherries, grapes, etc.
- Dried fruit: raisins, apricots, papayas, cranberries, etc.
- Unsweetened fruit juice
- Unsweetened fruit sauce
- Canned fruit in juice or light syrup

Milk and Alternatives

- Milk
- Flavoured milk (less than 35 grams total sugar per 250 ml)
- Yogurt
- Yogurt drinks
- Cheese: cheddar, feta, mozzarella, ricotta, cottage, etc.
- Fresh cheese
- Milk-based desserts: pudding, tapioca, flan
- Rice or soymilk beverages fortified with calcium and vitamin D

Grain Products

- Whole-wheat bread
- Multigrain bread
- Rye bread
- Oat bran bread
- Whole-wheat or multigrain pasta
- Whole-grain crackers
- Brown and wild rice
- Cereal bars
- Homemade bran muffins
- *Social Tea* type cookies
- Couscous, barley, millet, bulgur, quinoa
- Rice cakes

Meat and Alternatives

- Cold meats: ham, turkey, roast beef, pastrami (eye of round), chicken
- Fish and seafood (tuna or salmon packed in water)*
- Eggs
- Legumes: lentils, red kidney beans, chickpeas
- Nuts and seeds*
- Soy products (tofu)
- Peanut butter*

* When packing lunches, make sure to comply with school guidelines concerning food allergies.

COLD LUNCHES

> Although sandwiches are often the basis of most boxed lunches, they don't have to be boring. Use different types of fillings and breads (e.g. pitas, Kaiser rolls, bagels, tortilla wraps, English muffins, whole-wheat panini, etc.). And remember to use light mayonnaise.

Here are some ideas that can add life to traditional sandwiches:¹

- Plain yogurt, grated cheese, grated apple and chopped nuts
- Hummus (chickpeas purée), grated carrot and zucchini
- Chopped hard-boiled eggs, parsley, stuffed olives and mayonnaise
- Cooked ground chicken, salsa, mango, red pepper and sour cream
- Flaked tuna packed in water, chopped red pepper, chopped celery, green onion and plain yogurt
- Crushed avocado, chopped shrimp, lemon juice, shredded lettuce and plain yogurt

1. Marie Breton and Isabelle Émond, *Boîte à lunch emballante* (Montréal: Flammarion Québec, 2001).

> Salads are also excellent options:

- Mixture of cooked whole-wheat and enriched pasta, raw vegetables (e.g. pepper, celery, zucchini), low-fat dressing, ham cubes
- Cherry tomatoes, chopped peppers, chopped red onion, feta cheese, black olives, low-fat Greek dressing
- Couscous, raisins, chickpeas, diced tomatoes, green onion
- Spinach, clementines, grapefruit, plain yogurt, lemon juice, cashews

You can replace part of the mayonnaise with plain yogurt in salad dressings and dips.

HOT LUNCHES

> With insulated food containers (thermos) or microwavable containers, leftovers from balanced meals can make great lunches the next day. Frozen meals can also come in handy once in a while, but pay attention to their fat and sodium content (which can vary significantly depending on the product) and the amount of protein and vegetables (which may not be sufficient). If that is the case, you can round out the meal with a piece of cheese, some raw vegetables, a milk-based dessert and a piece of fruit.

> Here are some tips on how to keep foods **hot**:

- Pour boiling water into the thermos, let it sit for 15 minutes and pour out the water before putting in the food. This should help keep foods hot for about five hours.
- Use microwave-safe containers to reheat cooked foods.

> There should be enough refrigerators, microwave ovens, etc. at school to help students keep their lunches cool and to allow them to reheat food as needed.

HYGIENE AND FOOD SAFETY

> Never leave a lunch box sitting on a windowsill or near a heat source as this could affect food quality and safety.

> Clean lunch boxes daily using soap and hot water. A bit of baking soda will help eliminate odours.

> Here are some tips on how to keep foods **cold**:

- Use an insulated lunch bag (*Ice pack*) that will keep foods cold for four to six hours.
- Add a frozen juice box or yogurt to help keep foods cold until lunchtime.
- Use pre-refrigerated ingredients in sandwiches and salads (e.g. prepare an egg salad filling the night before). Foods that are already cold will stay cold longer.

EXAMPLES OF A BALANCED LUNCH BOX

The examples below do not include quantities or serving sizes. These should be adapted to the age and size of the student. For more information, please consult *Canada's Food Guide* at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/order-commander/index_e.html.

Tuna sandwich (12-grain bread, canned tuna packed in water, drained, light cream cheese, finely chopped Spanish onion, lemon juice)

Vegetable juice

Dried fruit

Yogurt

Homemade muffin

Chicken on Kaiser roll (whole-wheat Kaiser roll, cooked ground chicken, light mayonnaise, salsa, finely chopped green onion, salt and pepper)

Milk

Banana

Unsweetened fruit sauce

Rice cakes

Rotini with eggs (tri-colour or whole-wheat rotini pasta, hard-boiled eggs, light mayonnaise, black olives, chopped red pepper and celery, salt and pepper)

Apple juice

Cheddar cheese slice

Oatmeal cookie

Unsweetened fruit bar

Spaghetti with meat sauce (whole-wheat pasta, tomato and meat sauce, grated Parmesan cheese)

Water

Salad (romaine lettuce, cucumber, tomato, carrots and dressing)

Cottage cheese with strawberries

Raisins

Bean salad (canned mixed beans, Italian dressing, onion, grated carrot, chopped tomato, parsley, salt and pepper)

Tropical fruit juice

Raw vegetables (baby carrots and cucumber slices)

Homemade banana bread

Yogurt tube

Chicken couscous (couscous, diced cooked chicken, cherry tomatoes, sodium reduced chicken broth, coriander, cooked carrots)

Soymilk enriched beverage

Fruit parfait (plain yogurt, fresh or frozen raisins, muesli cereal)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONSULT THE FOLLOWING WEB SITES:

MELS

www.mels.gouv.qc.ca

MSSS

www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/sujets/santepub

MAPAQ

www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/mesaliments

www.securitedesaliments.gouv.qc.ca

www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/consommation/qualitedesaliments/allergiesalimentaires

Do it for you! Program

www.vasy.gouv.qc.ca/index_en.html

Health Canada

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index_e.html

Association québécoise des allergies alimentaires

www.aqaa.qc.ca