



## Healthy School Lunches

September is here and school is back in session, which means lots of lunches are being packed. Packing a healthy lunch can be a challenge, especially when you have little time to plan a healthy meal and when the urge is so strong to grab readymade packaged snacks. According to the American Dietetic Association, "Lunch plays a critical role in children's overall health and school performance. When children skip lunch, they are likely to have trouble concentrating in the classroom, lack energy, lack energy for sports and overeat on low-nutrient after-school snacks."

When packing a school lunch here are a few things to keep in mind;

- Ask your kids to help plan and pack their lunches. Kids will usually eat what they pack
- Plan out what you are going to eat in advance. Putting food in bags the night before will make the morning smoother and will not tempt you to pack some prepackaged snack that carries high amounts of salts and sugars.
- Keep a record of what nutritious foods your kids enjoy eating and add them into their lunches.
- Come up with other options for picky eaters. For example if a child doesn't like sandwiches, try a wrap, cheese and crackers, or just the meat and cheese rolled together!
- Make lunches as exciting as possible. Incorporate lots of different colors, and fun shapes. Using a cookie cutter to trim sandwiches can make lunches fun.
- Don't deprive kids of snacks and treats; it is important that they have a balance of the good and the bad foods.

Liz Watt, a Registered Dietitian with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, suggests parents follow an 80-20 rule: Pack 80 percent healthy items and 20 percent "fun foods," such as a cookie or a piece of candy. "You're not being too strict about it, and you're also not giving them a bunch of junk food," Watt said in a recently published piece by UNC Health Care. "If it's like that, it's more likely to be eaten."

For more information:

The American Dietetic Association at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

Let's Move at [www.letsmove.gov/](http://www.letsmove.gov/)

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