

LUNCHBOX MAKOVERS

Tips for Kicking off a Wholesome School Year

Along with the sneakers, backpacks, and school supplies to start the new school year, it's important for parents and caregivers to make sure their kids are getting the nutrition they need to make it through an activity-packed school day.

"There are healthy choices for children's lunches," says Doug Degn, executive vice president for food and consumables for Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. "The addition of products like fruit cups or baby carrots to the lunchbox are simple ways to make lunchtime healthier."

Degn and Wal-Mart Stores, offer the following tips for kicking off a wholesome new school year:

Start with the Basics

Peanut butter and jelly, turkey, ham, chicken salad, and tuna salad are healthful sandwich fillings loaded with protein – but sandwich bread is equally important. Some wholesome varieties include:

- IronKids Wheat Bread is soft bread sweetened with honey for taste. One slice has three grams of protein and all the fiber of whole wheat; two slices have the same amount of calcium as a single glass of milk.
- Hero Kids' Recipe Bread from Mrs. Baird's is the ideal bread for kids who prefer not to eat wheat because Hero Kids' Recipe Bread provides more calcium and other nutrients than regular white bread.
- Nature's Own Honey Wheat Bread is another alternative that is made with natural ingredients and doesn't contain preservatives.
- There are a variety of breads on the market today. Experiment to find a favorite taste and texture that will provide the best vitamins and nutrients possible.



Add a Side

Selections for wholesome side dishes are growing by the day in our increasingly health-conscious society, making it easier to include healthy lunchbox selections.

- Baby peeled carrots can often be purchased in snack pack sizes, some as small as three ounces.
- Fruit is another convenient and healthy option like apples, bananas, and grapes. Raisins or Craisins, a cranberry-raisin combination, are tasty dried fruit alternatives that are easy to purchase in bulk and remain fresh for days.
- If raw fruit and veggies don't do the trick, fruit cups like Mott's Applesauce, DelMonte fruit cups, or Dole FruitBowls add a little bit of zing to a school lunch and are also easy to pack. Since these can be purchased in single servings, it's easy to add in something healthy to a school lunch.
- Yogurt cups such as Dannon Danimals Yogurt, with vitamin D and calcium, are another healthful option. Try GoGurt, yogurt in a tube, so you don't need to pack a spoon for kids to enjoy this healthy side.



Washing it Down

No matter how badly they want it, it's always a good idea to avoid packing sugar-packed sodas in a growing child's lunch. There are many alternatives to soda on the market, many of which will, believe it or not, appeal to kids. And you can place frozen fruit drinks packaged in foil or cartons in the lunch box to keep foods cool until lunchtime.

- V8 Splash has more of the antioxidant vitamins A, C, and E than orange juice and is now available in single-servings and has a light, fresh taste.
- Tropicana Pure Premium Healthy Kids Orange Juice is also available in a package of six, and Kool-Aid Jammers, available in ready to go pouches, are convenient alternatives to soda.
- Drinking water is a very good habit to learn at an early age, and many water bottle companies make kid-sized bottled water that are ideal for children's lunches. Look for brands that add vitamins and nutrients.

Many discount retailers, like Wal-Mart, sell a variety of foods and snacks to make convenient, inexpensive, and wholesome school lunches and after-school snacks.

That Little Something Extra

Filling up a growing boy or girl can be difficult, but instead of reaching for sugar or fat-laden foods that can weigh kids down at lunchtime, there are several alternatives that can be added to a school lunch, and they make great after-school snacks:

- String cheese is a fun way for kids to get calcium in their diets.
- Granola, nutri-grain and cereal bars can be eaten as "dessert" or make a healthy breakfast for families on the go.
- Pudding cups are a great alternative to satisfy a sweet tooth. The grocery shelves are packed with several brands and flavors that do not require refrigeration.

