



K-State Research and Extension Family Nutrition Program

DINING ON A DIME

Eating Better for Less

August / September

Pack the “Sack” with Fun Nutrition!

Many families are choosing to pack lunches for school and work. This practice can save time and money, and reduce waste. But as the days turn into weeks, it can become a grueling task to keep your lunch box ideas fresh and fun for the kids, as well as healthy. This issue of *Dining on a Dime* is dedicated to giving you yummy homemade lunch ideas that will save your time and money while maximizing health!



- **Kabobs.** Sometimes, it’s all about presentation! Stringing bite-sized pieces of vegetables, cheese, fruit, and cooked fish or meat chunks onto skewers can be just the thing to tempt your child’s taste-buds. It’s also a great way to introduce a new food strung among some old favorites.
- **Make your own.** In the evening, fill a small container with a tight-fitting lid with a smoothie mixture, or with alternating spoonfuls of fat-free yogurt and fruit. Freeze. In the morning, pack a spoon and the frozen treat. It will still be semi-frozen by the time your child enjoys it at lunch, and it offers good nutrition in a “kid-friendly” way.
- **Warm it up.** Beyond sandwiches, think tacos, quesadillas, pasta and pizza for lunchtime variety that can be served hot or cold. An insulated thermos container can be a great way to pack warm soups, brown rice, whole-grain pasta dishes or oatmeal, as well as leftover dinners.
- **Sandwich in variety.** Even a simple change, such as from white sandwich bread to whole grain choices (including mini bagels, tortillas, pitas, muffins or crackers), can get kids more excited about good nutrition. Consider various fillings, such as a variety of thinly sliced vegetables, fruit chunks, dried fruit, fruit preserves, cooked dry beans, nuts, seeds, peanut butter, hummus, egg or tuna salad, leftovers such as last night’s meatloaf, chili or shredded cooked chicken, roasted meats and poultry, and sliced cheeses. For example, spread peanut butter on a whole wheat tortilla, roll up a banana in it, and then slice it into pieces for easier eating. If you need a simple protein food, pack hardboiled eggs, low-fat cottage cheese, low-fat cheese chunks, canned tuna or peanuts.
- **Get creative together.** Ask your child for his or her lunch ideas. And when time permits, encourage your child to help pack his or her own lunch with you.

Make the Grade on Food Safety

When preparing lunch boxes or sack lunches for yourself or your child, consider these tips to ensure safe food handling:



Wash, wash, wash. Keep everything clean before and during lunch preparation: your hands, work surfaces, utensils and food. Use hot soapy water to wash your hands and to clean food preparation surfaces and utensils. Rinse fresh produce under cool running water. Avoid touching family pets, and keep them away from kitchen counters.

Keep foods out of the temperature “danger zone.” Bacteria grow quickly between the temperatures of 40 and 140 degrees F., so follow these next two rules.

Keep cold foods cold. You have several options for doing this. Use an insulated lunch box or bag. Make a meat sandwich the evening before and freeze it. Or, pack either freezer gel packs or containers of frozen fruit or frozen juice. Pack perishable products, such as meat sandwiches, between these cold items. Freezer gel packs will usually keep food cold until lunchtime. Keep lunches out of direct sunlight and away from radiators and other heat sources.

Keep hot foods hot. Soups and reheated leftovers need to stay hot, not just lukewarm. Fill an insulated thermos container with boiling water and let it stand for a few minutes. Then empty it and put in the piping-hot food or beverage. It should stay hot throughout the morning until lunchtime.

Wash your hands before eating, or use hand sanitizer.

Throw it away at the end of the day. Perishable leftovers brought home at the end of the day should be tossed into the garbage, because these foods are no longer safe to eat. To cut down on waste, practice portion control.

Also discard disposable plastic eating utensils, plates, cups and containers, as well as commercially-filled water bottles, paper napkins, and sandwich bags, foil, and plastic wrap that have been in contact with perishable foods. According to the FDA, these items are developed with the intention of single service and are not made of materials designed for repeated use or cleaning. To reduce waste, use utensils, food containers and beverage bottles that are reusable instead.

Wash reusable containers and bottles daily. Wide-mouth reusable milk and water bottles are easier to clean than those with a narrow opening. Clean all reusable containers and their lids or caps with hot soapy water. Rinse them well, then let them air dry.

Enjoy a healthy and safe school year!

Source (Accessed 7/23/12): [Tips for Better School Lunches and After-School Snacks](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/NR/rdonlyres/97CFD03C-B96A-4567-A144-B45CC8A14D5D/8427/HealthyLunchesSnacks.pdf), Iowa State University Extension, www.extension.iastate.edu/NR/rdonlyres/97CFD03C-B96A-4567-A144-B45CC8A14D5D/8427/HealthyLunchesSnacks.pdf

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Save Money on Home-Packed Lunches

Lunches provided at school are affordable options. But if your family members choose packed lunches to tote to school or to work, here are some ways to keep the costs down.



- **Use reusable containers.** Using paper lunch sacks, disposable plastic wrappers and sandwich bags, and other single-service items is like throwing money away every day. Instead, buy durable food containers with tight-fitting lids in a variety of sizes to fit your lunchbox needs. You will save money, help the environment and add color to your day by using reusable lunch boxes, sandwich and other food containers, beverage bottles, napkins and eating utensils.
- **Avoid single serving packages.** You will save money and also help the environment if you buy large containers of common lunch box foods and beverages instead of buying packaged lunch meals or single serving sizes. A home-packed lunch not only costs less than pre-packaged lunch meals, but typically provides more food and more nutrients. Portion out a lunch-sized amount of each food (such as fruit, cut-up vegetables, yogurt or beverages) into reusable containers. The same advice goes for cheeses. It's usually much cheaper to buy a large block of cheese and cut it into cubes or logs for you or your child's lunch, rather than purchasing cheese sticks and other processed cheese snacks.
- **Prepare, cook and bake ahead.** In the evenings and on weekends, prepare extra servings of cold foods, such as chopped vegetables, pasta or rice salads, and puddings. Similarly, cook larger batches of soups, casseroles, spaghetti, stews or other inexpensive and healthy main dishes. In the morning, reheat and pack a serving into a hot thermos for lunch. In addition, bake healthful breads, muffins, cookies and even brownies (see the recipe on page 4). Pack in nutrition by using recipes that call for whole wheat flour, rolled oats, pumpkin puree, bananas, shredded carrots or zucchini, raisins, or other fruits, vegetables, seeds and nuts. Freeze in small portions in tightly-sealed reusable containers. Serve once a week as a treat that will thaw by lunchtime.
- **Plan ahead.** Plan weekly menus and buy enough food to include two servings of a fresh, frozen, canned or dried fruit or vegetable, or both, for each lunch. Pack at least part of each lunch the night before, or even over the weekend. This will help you avoid rushing to throw the meal together minutes before you or your child have to leave home, and you'll be more likely to choose economical and healthy options. Make packing lunches a fun family affair. Direct tasks to children based on his or her age and skill level. When kids are involved, they'll be more likely to try new foods and it raises their interest in nutrition, which earns everyone an A+!

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office. This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, call 1-888-369-4777.



Dining on a Dime's Cooks' Corner

Fudgy Brownies (Makes 12 servings)

Yummy and moist, these brownies provide some whole grains, fruit, vegetables and less fat, sugar and sodium than most!

Ingredients

3/4 cup cooked black beans,
cooked without added salt

2 raw eggs

2/3 cup sugar

1/2 cup unsweetened applesauce

1/4 cup mini chocolate chips

1/3 cup whole wheat flour

1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa
powder

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

Directions

1. Spray an 8 x 8-inch baking pan with non-stick cooking spray. **2.** Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. **3.** On a plate, mash beans with a fork until smooth. **4.** In a mixing bowl, stir together beans, eggs, sugar, applesauce and chocolate chips. Set aside. **5.** In another mixing bowl, stir together flour, cocoa and baking powder. **6.** Stir wet mixture into the dry mixture until just blended. **7.** Pour into the prepared pan. **8.** Bake for 25 minutes, or until firm in the middle and the sides begin to pull away from the pan. **9.** When cool, cut into 12 pieces.

Nutrition Facts per serving: 110 calories, 2.5g fat, 1g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 30mg cholesterol, 35mg sodium, 21g carbohydrate, 1g dietary fiber, 3g protein. Daily Values: 0% vitamins A and C, 2% calcium, 2% iron.



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