

Foods to put in a lunch box



Suggestions include:

- Fresh fruit
- Crunchy vegetables
- A meat or protein food such as slices of lean meat, hardboiled egg, peanut butter or nut paste*
- Dairy food such as a cheese stick or slice, grated cheese, milk or yoghurt
- Starchy food such as bread, a roll, pita or flat bread, fruit bread or crackers
- Water

Food suggestions for lunch boxes

There are lots of food choices available for lunch boxes. However, it can sometimes be difficult to decide which foods are healthy choices. Suggestions include:

- **Fruit** – best choices include fresh or tinned fruit. Dried fruit is sticky and high in sugar, so have it occasionally. Best left out of the lunch box are dried fruit bars and ‘straps’, which are very high in sugar, low in fibre and stick to children’s teeth causing tooth decay.
- **Vegetables** – try vegetable sticks with dip or a small container with mixed vegetables such as cherry tomatoes, carrot sticks, pepper and cucumber. Packets of crisps are best left for parties and special occasions.
- **Milk, yoghurt and custard** – include a small drink of milk (freeze overnight) wrapped in a cloth in the lunch box. Fruit yoghurts should be kept cool in an insulated lunch box. Best left out of the lunch box are ‘dairy desserts’ and flavoured milks, which are high in sugar.
- **Dips, cheese and biscuits** – pre-packaged or your own homemade versions of cheese and crackers are fine. Children enjoy mini packaged cheeses. Avoid sweet dips such as chocolate spreads. ‘Oven-baked’ savoury biscuits are just as high in salt and fat as chips and are best avoided.
- **Different breads add interest** – include a variety of bread, especially if children begin to lose interest in sandwiches. Try bread rolls, pita bread, flat bread, bagels, fruit loaf or buns, foccacia, scones, muffins, crumpets, crispbreads, rice cakes or corn thins.
- **Vary the fillings** – fillings can include vegemite or other yeast extract, peanut butter, cheese (try different types), tuna, egg, sliced cold meats, baked beans,

grated carrot and lettuce, chopped roast meat with pickles or chutney, and avocado. Dips like caviar (taramosalata), aubergine, chickpea (hoummus), cucumber, yoghurt (tzatziki) or spinach also make good spreads. Avoid chocolate spreads, jams and honey, and fatty meats like salami and strasbourg.

- **Muffins and cakes** – try making your own muffins and cakes as a great way to include more fruit and vegetables. Examples include sultana, carrot, courgette, banana or pumpkin. Donuts and creamy cakes are best offered at birthdays and special occasions instead of in lunch boxes.
- **Muesli and ‘breakfast’ bars** – almost all ‘bars’ are too high in sugar to include regularly, but cereal bars may be better for teeth than chewy sticky muesli bars. Try to avoid muesli bars and chocolate bars in lunch boxes. These are expensive and usually stuck together with fats and sugars.

Practical issues for busy families

Foods should be simple and easy to prepare, ready to eat and appetising after several hours storage in the lunch box. Foods such as sandwiches can be prepared the night before or on the weekend, frozen, then taken for each day’s lunch box. Suitable foods to freeze include:

- Bread
- Cooked meat
- Cheese
- Peanut butter
- Baked beans
- Mashed eggs
- Yeast or vegetable spreads such as Vegemite.

Food safety in lunch boxes

In most cases, food is stored in lunch boxes for several hours, so the lunch box needs to stay cool. Food safety suggestions include:

- Choose an insulated lunch box or one with a freezer pack, or include a wrapped frozen water bottle to keep the lunch box cool.
- Follow hygienic food preparation methods. This is especially important when food will be stored in the lunch box for many hours before eating.
- Prepare lunches the night before and store in the fridge or freezer.

- Perishable foods such as dairy products, eggs and sliced meats should be kept cool and eaten within about four hours of preparation. Don't pack these foods if just cooked. First cool in the refrigerator overnight.

Best drinks for lunch boxes

Water and milk are the best drinks for children. They can be frozen to help keep foods in the lunch box cool. Sweet drinks such as fruit juices, juice drinks, cordials, sports drinks, flavoured mineral waters, soft drinks and fizzy drinks are high in sugar and not necessary. These drinks can increase the risk of tooth decay, are filling and may take the place of healthier foods. We do not allow pupils to drink anything but water or milk in school.