Packed Lunch Ideas
use your imagination!

A packed lunch does not have to be boring - with a little imagination you could have a different sandwich for every day of the year. For the perfect balance, make sure you include foods from the major food groups plus a drink:

1. A starchy food such as bread, pasta, rice or potatoes

2. A protein food such as beans, peas, or soya products or a dairy food such as cheese or cheese spread

3. Some vegetables such as cherry tomatoes, carrot sticks or sweetcorn. A piece of fruit such as a banana, a box of raisins or a pot of fruit salad

4. A drink, such as fruit juice, milk or water

Dairy foods are a good source of calcium so try to have three portions a day. For example low fat yoghurt, fromage frais or semi-skimmed milk.

Low fat dairy foods are the best choice for children over 2 years old.
Sandwiches can be made much more interesting by varying the type of bread you use, and bread can be served as it comes or toasted.

You could try:
- Wholemeal, granary, white or high fibre white bread
- Tortilla wraps or chapattis
- Crisp bread or crackers
- Rolls, panini, or bagels
- Pitta bread

Vegetarian ideas

For those days when you are short of time, there are many ready-made vegetarian products in the shops that can be kept in the store cupboard or fridge and make great sandwiches in an instant, such as:
- Bean paté
- Hummus
- Tofu fillets
- Vegetarian cheese
- Fake meat slices eg. Redwood 'Cheatin' Meat range
- Falafels – made from chickpeas
- Vegetarian sandwich spread eg. Tartex
- Quorn deli slices, patés and rashers
- Slice of pizza
1. Falafels

A great alternative to burgers and something different for a packed lunch.
2 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil
1 small onion - finely chopped
1 garlic clove - crushed
400g chickpeas - drained, rinsed and mashed
1 teaspoon each of ground cumin and coriander
1 teaspoon mixed herbs
1 egg - beaten

Method
Gently fry the onion and garlic until soft in one tablespoon of oil. Add to a mixing bowl with the chickpeas, herbs and spices. Add the egg and mix together with clean hands. Form into 6 evenly shaped balls and then squash to form patties. Add the other tablespoon of oil to a frying pan and fry for 3 minutes on each side until firm and golden brown. Serve in pitta with fresh salad.

2. Hummus

1 tin drained chickpeas
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 clove crushed garlic
3-4 x 15ml spoons water

Method
Open the chickpeas and use the sieve to drain away the liquid. Tip the chickpeas into the blender. Use the juice squeezer to remove the juice from the lemon and pour it into the blender. Add the garlic to the blender. Place the lid on the blender and switch on for 15-20 seconds. Turn the blender off. Use a spatula to move the chickpeas away from the edge of the blender. Add 1x15ml spoon of water. Place the lid on the blender and switch on for 15-20 seconds. Repeat this until a smooth paste is produced.
3. Sardine spread

This is a really easy recipe using oily fish. The cream cheese softens the fishy flavour and children love it!

100g low fat soft cheese with black pepper
120g canned sardines in spring water
½ lemon

Method
Open the sardines, drain and add to a mixing bowl. Spoon the low fat soft cheese into the bowl, squeeze the lemon and add. Mix the ingredients to make a smooth paste. Spread on a sandwich or use as a dip with vegetable sticks.

4. Chicken or cheese salsa wrap

This is a lovely fresh, zingy alternative to a sandwich.
4 wraps
75g chicken or cheese, diced
¼ cucumber, chopped
2 small ripe tomatoes, chopped
Small handful parsley, finely chopped (optional)
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Method
To avoid the wrap becoming soggy, remove the seeds from the tomatoes and the centre out of the cucumber. Mix all the salsa ingredients together and spoon a line of salsa down the middle of the wrap. Roll up tightly.

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For a healthy balance, include

**Fruit and vegetables**
Always include fruit and vegetables in a packed lunch
Try:
- Carrot sticks with a dip
- Cherry Tomatoes
- Celery sticks
- Salad leaves or cucumber in sandwiches for a fresh taste
- Fresh fruit
- Fruit Salad
- Dried fruit e.g. raisins, apricots, figs
- Fruit juice

**Meat, fish and alternatives**
Always include a protein-rich food in a packed lunch. For example:
- Lean cooked meats such as chicken or turkey
- Cheese, especially lower fat versions
- Eggs - hard boiled
- Fish - tinned tuna, sardines (drained of oil or brine)
- Pulses - home made or bought lentil or bean paté or dahl
- Hummus

Use a cool bag to keep dairy foods and meats cold and safe. For a small cool bag will keep the lunch box cold all morning. Dishes containing rice and potato can be cooked and stored in the fridge. Keep to a minimum.
Bread, cereals and potatoes
Always include a starchy food in a packed lunch
Try:
- Different types of bread e.g. wholemeal granary rolls
- Wholemeal pitta bread or chapatti
- High fibre white bread
- Tortilla wraps
- Pillau rice
- Crispbread
- Bagels

Milk and dairy foods
For example:
- Cheese spread in a sandwich
- Chunks of hard cheese
- Flavoured yoghurt or lassi
- Plain yoghurt with added fresh fruit
- Plain or flavoured milk
- Raita

Safety Tips!
For added chilling, freeze a carton of fruit juice the night before and it
and/or cooked meats should be refrigerated within 90 minutes of
Keep for a maximum of three days.
1. Couscous and chickpea salad

1 cup couscous
1 ¼ cups boiling water/vegetable stock cube
3 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons lemon juice
Crushed garlic
1 teaspoon ground cumin, 1 teaspoon ground coriander,
½ teaspoon grated fresh ginger
1 grated carrot
½ red pepper – finely chopped
¼ red onion – finely sliced/diced
1 cup drained chickpeas
2 tablespoons chopped parsley

Method

Pour boiling water over couscous, cover with cloth and leave for 5 minutes. In bowl, mix oil, vinegar, juice and spices – mix well. Fluff couscous with a fork, stir in carrot, pepper, onion, chickpeas and parsley. Pour over dressing and mix.
2. Pasta salad
Small tin of kidney beans
Small tin of sweetcorn
1 green pepper
75g of uncooked pasta
For the Dressing:
3 dessertspoons olive oil
1/2 teaspoon mustard
1 dessertspoon of balsamic vinegar

**Method**
For the Dressing:
Put ingredients in a pot with tight fitting lid. Seal and shake.

Cook pasta for approx 10 minutes. Open and drain tins. Rinse contents. Finely chop the pepper. Put all ingredients in a large bowl. Add dressing. Mix using your hands.

3. Tuna potato salad
1 large potato (150g after peeled weight)
1 medium tin of tuna
3 small tomatoes
Small tin of sweetcorn
2 dessertspoons of low fat mayonnaise

**Method**
Peel and chop the potato into small cubes (approx 20cm).
Boil for 15 mins or microwave in a small amount of water for 4 minutes. Open and drain tins. Chop tomatoes to same size as potatoes. Put all ingredients in large bowl. Mix.
Tasty Ideas!

Meat
- Cooked and sliced chicken, ham and beef
- Tinned meats such as corned beef and ham (*but only occasionally as they are high in fat*)

Fish
- Tinned fish such as sardines or tuna with cucumber
- Smoked fish with cream cheese (*use occasionally as it can be high in salt*)
- Salmon paste with peas
- Tuna with sweetcorn and low fat mayonnaise

Cheese
- Sliced low fat cheese with salad or apple or pickle or tomato
- Grated cheese with grated carrot
- Light cheese spread with either grated carrot and raisins, salad or sliced apple
- Cottage cheese with dried apricots

Egg
- Egg, hard boiled mixed with low fat salad cream
- Egg, sliced with sliced tomato, cress or salad.

Beans and Pulses
- Bean paté
- Mediterranean vegetables and beans
- Dhal in chapatti
- Chickpea chana chaat with rice
Fruity ideas

Fruit Boats
Instead of a whole orange, try cutting it into 4 and popping it into a small sealed bag.

Mini fruit boxes
Mixed grapes, a peeled satsuma, pre-sliced kiwi fruit, blueberries or sliced strawberries.

Home-made juice and milkshakes
Liquidise your child's favourite fruits to make a fruit drink. Add fresh fruit to milk and liquidise to make a healthy milkshake. Put in a thermos flask to keep cool until lunchtime.

Fruit pizza
Spread half a bagel with a little low fat fromage frais. Top with thinly sliced pieces of fruit. Fruits such as strawberries, grapes, melon and pineapple work best as they do not go brown. Wrap in tinfoil to keep fresh.

Fruit yogurt
Add fresh fruit to plain low fat yogurt - much lower in sugar with more fruit than a conventional fruit yogurt.

Fruit dippers
Cut fruit into chunks and put it on cocktail sticks to dip into yogurt or low fat fromage frais.

Fruit kebabs
Thread chunks of fruit onto a kebab stick to create colourful, fun treats. You can also buy fruit jellies and small pots of fruit in juice from the supermarket.

Little boxes of raisins and other dried fruit are great for packed lunches (dried fruit is best kept to meal times as it can result in tooth decay if eaten between meals). Try to avoid dried fruit with yoghourt coatings as these are even more sugary.
Drinks

- For healthy teeth, only have milk or water between meals.
- Always include a drink with your meal.
- Fruit juice, pure fruit smoothies, milk or water are the best choices.

Spot the difference!

Q: How can you tell whether your drink is pure fruit juice or squash?

A: Squash will be labelled ‘Juice drink’ on the carton or bottle. Squash is flavoured water and a less healthy choice than pure fruit juice.