

The Daily Union
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Title: "Sack Lunch Savvy"

With the first day of the school year coming up for students, your family may be packing more sack lunches. Taking a sack lunch to work or school allows you to take the foods you know you like and avoid the lines at the drive thru or at the school. But taking a sack lunch requires a bit of planning for nutrition and a lot of precaution when it comes to food safety.

The night before you plan to take a sack lunch, consider what you want to eat the next day. This will determine how you prepare the food and how it is packed. It will also give you time to prepare some items the night before and save time in the morning.

Before you begin to prepare your lunch, make sure you are working on a clean surface. Use hot soapy water to wipe the counter and wipe with a clean cloth or paper towel. Follow up with a good (20-second) hand scrubbing with soap. Rinse your hands off in warm water. Now you can get started.

Food Safety and Sack Lunches Keep foods either hot or cold. Do not leave food at room temperature for more than 2 hours (1 hour on very hot days).

- Boil foods such as soups, stews and chili, then immediately pour into a hot, sterile vacuum bottle. Sterilize vacuum bottle with boiling water.
- Use a freezer gel-pack or make one from a plastic container (such as a margarine tub) filled with water then frozen. Place these containers in the lunch bag or box. Insulated lunch bags keep foods colder than paper bags.
- To keep beverages cold and safe, place an empty sterilized vacuum bottle in the freezer compartment every evening.
- Freeze individual cartons of yogurt or containers (not glass) of fruit or vegetable juices (these will serve the same purpose as freezer-gel devices or homemade ice containers).
- Take sandwich fillings such as egg or tuna salad and slices of luncheon meats in a cold-keeping container to be spread on bread at lunch time.
- Don't let lunch sit in a warm place such as the car or in the sun.

If you don't want to worry about the temperature of the foods you pack, here are some foods safe for lunch without keeping hot or cold:

- Unopened canned meat or poultry products, opened and eaten immediately.
- Dried meats such as beef jerky.
- Crisp-cooked bacon.
- Peanut butter.
- Hard cheeses such as cheddar, Swiss, or American.
- Clean, well-scrubbed fruits and vegetables.
- Breads, crackers, cereals.
- Baked products such as cookies and cake.

Do you get tired of the same sandwich or salad every day? Try using your imagination to create safe, nutritious and tasty lunches. Here are some ideas that can change things up for your lunch bag selections:

- Mix peanut butter and:
- Applesauce with a dash of cinnamon; wheat germ and raisins can also added.
- Crushed pineapple and shredded carrots.
- Nonfat dry milk powder and honey or mashed banana.
- Dried fruits like raisins, apricots, dates, or prunes.
- Apple, orange, or banana chunks.
- Sesame, pumpkin, or sunflower seeds.

- Honey and crumbled bacon.
- Mix a grated or chopped mild cheese with a favorite salad dressing such as French or Italian, then stir in:
 - Sweet or dill pickles.
 - Chopped nuts.
 - Chopped onion, green pepper, cucumbers, celery, or bean sprouts.
 - Crushed, drained pineapple.
 - Chopped fruit such as apples or bananas.
- Use different types of breads.
- Try whole wheat, rye, raisin, French, or Italian bread.
- Fill pocket or pita bread with any of the above spreads.
- Use hot dog, hamburger, or Kaiser rolls.

Nutrition and Sack Lunches Packing a lunch for work or school can help you create a tasty and nutritious meal with foods you like. When you pack your own lunch, there are several ways you can make it healthier. Keep calories, fat, and sodium in mind when you choose condiments, spreads, and other foods that you add to sandwiches. Check the nutrition label if you don't know what the levels are in commercial products. Purchase "light", or "low-fat" condiments. Use fresh vegetables to add to low-fat, low sodium deli meats.

Need more ideas for nutritious sack lunches? Use the MyPlate model to give you additional options. MyPlate was released by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a way to help Americans quickly plan a healthy meal. The icon shows a plate that is half full of fruits and vegetables, and the other half with protein foods and grains. The grain icon is a little larger than the protein icon and the vegetable is larger than fruit, meaning you need a little more grains and vegetables. There is a dairy icon next to the plate.

When you are planning school lunches, imagine how the foods you choose will fit on the plate. Think about choosing foods that will pack safely and that you or your student will enjoy.



A lunch box meal using MyPlate could include a peanut butter and jelly whole-wheat tortilla roll-up, grapes, carrot sticks and milk purchased at school. Another idea could be whole-wheat crackers with cheese and turkey slices, cherry tomatoes, sugar snap peas, small banana and water.

For more information on planning a preparing healthy meals, including sack lunches, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161.

Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

