SEND packed lunches guide

Packed lunches can be a great option for children who have specific dietary requirements, allergies or sensory needs and allows children and young people (CYP) with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to enjoy their favourite and familiar foods in a safe environment. Packed lunches brought from home and consumed in school (or on school trips) should provide children with nutritious food that is similar in quality to food served at school, as per the school food standards.

What should be in a packed lunch?

Starchy foods

- 50/50 or wholemeal bread
- pasta
- rice
- couscous or other grains
- noodles



- wholemeal chapattis or rotis
- wholemeal pitta or wraps
- potatoes
- other cereals

Protein

- meat
- fish
- eggs
- beans
- pulses
- non-dairy protein



Milk & Dairy

- milk
- yoghurt
- cheese
- fromage frais
- custard
- soya, oats or pea drinks



Vegetables

- carrots
- tomatoes
- cucumber
- spinach
- peppers
- avocado



Fruits

- bananas
- melon
- apples
- satsumas
- strawberries
- pineapple



Avoid:

- salty snacks e.g. crisps, salted nuts, fruit or veg with added sugar or salt
- confectionery e.g. sweets, chocolate bars, chocolate-coated products, biscuits
- any drink that is not water

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A balanced packed lunch

Assembling a packed lunch that meets school food standards (SFS) can be challenging, especially considering individual dietary and sensory restrictions. It's important to remember that many foods can be adapted to meet these standards without sacrificing taste or enjoyment. We encourage families to explore a variety of options and involve children and young people (CYP) in the process, making healthy eating an empowering and enjoyable experience, both at home and in school.

One portion of starchy food (ideally wholegrain) and one source of protein


lentil and sweet potato curry


chicken wrap


tuna pasta salad


egg fried rice


bean chilli


hummus sandwich


chicken and vegetable noodles

One portion of vegetable and one portion of fruit


apple


banana


orange


pear


strawberries


sugar snap peas


pepper

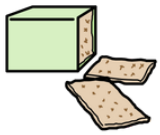

fruit/veg puree


cucumber


carrot

One snack


breadsticks


crackers


yoghurt


hummus

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Balanced packed lunch examples


hummus sandwich

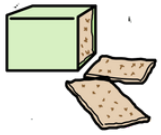
+ and


pepper

+ and


strawberries

+ and


crackers


bean chilli

+ and


pitta

+ and


carrot

+ and


banana


chicken wrap

+ and


cucumber

+ and


apple

+ and


yoghurt


tuna pasta salad

+ and


sugar snap peas

+ and


orange

+ and


breadsticks

+ and


water

= =



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Packed lunch tips

Keep different types of wholegrain bread products in the freezer so you have a variety of options that will last longer – bagels, pittas, a sliced loaf, wraps.

Use leftover veg or roast meat from the day before to make cold pasta salads or sandwiches.

Buy tinned fruit in juice (not syrup) and frozen or tinned vegetables - they are just as nutritious and cheaper to buy!

Involve your child with making their own lunch - cutting the fruit and veg or adding salad to their wrap (do it the day before and squeeze some lemon on the fruit to keep it fresh).

Dipping foods are fun and a happy change from a sandwich every day. Provide a low-fat dip such as hummus or tzatziki so they can dunk their carrots or peppers.

Taste the rainbow - try a variety of different fruits and vegetables for a visually fun packed lunch.

Lunch box tips

- Use containers that are easy for your child to open independently
- Consider using small containers to separate items, which can help with portion control, organisation and avoids foods touching each other
- Finger foods can be easier for some children to manage and can make lunchtime fun. Consider things like wraps, pinwheels or cut-up fruits and vegetables
- Include a small item from home (like a note or a familiar toy) to provide comfort and a sense of connection during lunch
- Encourage your child to share what they liked or didn't like about their lunch and adjust accordingly
- Communicate with teachers/TAs about any other specific needs during lunch

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