

## The West Midlands Active lifestyle and healthy Eating in School children study

### HEALTHY SNACKS AND PACKED LUNCHES PARENT INFORMATION

Welcome to the second edition of the WAVES cooking workshop information. This information focuses on healthy snacks and packed lunches.

#### What is a healthy snack?

Children often get hungry between meals, and a healthy snack can be a good way of keeping their energy levels up. A healthy snack should be low in sugar, salt and fat, high in fibre and provide your child with some vitamins and minerals. Healthy snacks will also help children to feel fuller for longer and keep hunger at bay until meal time. Fruit and vegetables make ideal snacks, however low-fat dairy and starchy foods are also great options. It can sometimes be difficult to find healthy snacks for children, but we hope this information will help you to select some good options.

- Easy-to-eat fruit or vegetables can be good snacks, such as bananas, apples, grapes, easy peel oranges, or carrot and cucumber sticks. Preparing snacks at home to take out in small plastic tubs or wrapped in cling film can be a cost effective option.
- Dried fruits can also be a good alternative.
- If children are in need of a larger snack, there are lots of other options, such as healthy sandwiches, a bowl of low sugar cereal, fruit bread or malt loaf.
- Water is the best drink for children to have in between meals, and it is important for children to stay hydrated throughout the day.
- Commercially available fruit flavoured drinks (such as Ribena, Fruit Shoot and Rubicon Juice Drinks) are often high in sugar and contain little fruit so it can be important to check the sugar content on the label. Lower sugar options could be diluted squash or diluted pure fruit juices.

#### Packed lunches

If your child takes a packed lunch to school, or for day trips, it can sometimes be challenging to put together a selection of healthy foods that you feel confident your child will want to eat. The following section may help to give you some ideas as to what a healthy packed lunch is and a variety of options to keep your child's packed lunch interesting and appealing. Planning for the week in advance can help to make preparing a lunch box each day less time consuming overall.

**What is a healthy packed lunch?** A healthy packed lunch will help children to feel full and give them sufficient energy for their afternoon activities. It is also a source of important nutrients for their overall health and wellbeing.



**What to put in a lunch box?** The National Health Service (NHS) has developed recommendations for healthy packed lunches (<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/childhealth6-15/Pages/Lighterlunchboxes.aspx>). A summary of their recommendations are outlined below. They suggest that a healthy lunchbox should contain the following:



**A starchy food (i.e. bread, pasta or rice)**

These are a good source of energy as well as fibre. Wholemeal bread is a good option for sandwiches, and for some variation you could also try alternatives such as pitta pockets or wraps. If your child is reluctant to eat wholemeal bread you could try using varieties which are a combination of both white and wholemeal flour (for example, Hovis Best of Both or Kingsmill 50/50). An alternative to bread could be pasta, rice or couscous salads which if prepared the night before could save an early morning rush. Using leftovers from dinner can also be a time and cost effective option.

**A protein food (such as meat, fish, eggs or beans)**

Protein is important for children's healthy growth and development. Adding a protein filling to a sandwich or mixed in with pasta, rice or couscous will also help children to feel fuller for longer and stay alert for their afternoon activities. Options could include chicken, ham, boiled eggs, canned tuna, lentils or beans.



**A dairy item (such as milk, cheese or yoghurt)**

Dairy food is a good source of calcium and other vitamins and minerals which aid development of children's bones and teeth. Ideal options for the lunch box include yoghurts, small portions of cheese or a carton of semi-skimmed milk.

**A vegetable or salad item and a portion of fruit**

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of fibre as well as essential nutrients for healthy growth and wellbeing. Raw vegetables such as cucumber or carrot sticks can be great for the lunchbox and easy for children to eat with their fingers. The addition of a dip, such as low-fat hummus, cream cheese or salsa can help make the vegetables more exciting. Preparing fruits in advance can also help to make them more appealing for children, such as ready chopped apples or a tub of fruit salad with some seasonal fruits. Tinned fruits put into smaller pots could be taken to school if your child's preferred fruit is not in season, but remember to buy fruits tinned in juice rather than syrup. Dried fruit is also a good option to replace chocolate bar or cakes in the lunchbox. Larger packets of dried fruit are often cheaper than individual portion boxes so it can be more cost effective to divide them up into small sandwich bags.



**Drinks**

Water is a good choice for children's lunchboxes. If your child prefers a flavoured drink, options such as diluted pure fruit juice or diluted squash drinks can be a compromise. Over time you could increase the water content of the diluted juices.

### **Cutting down on foods high in saturated fats and sugars**

Some popular lunchtime foods can be high in saturated fats and/or sugars, such as crisps, chocolate bars, processed foods (e.g. sausage rolls) and sweets. These types of foods can encourage children to consume more energy than they require which can lead to weight gain. In addition, foods high in sugar are bad for the teeth, and children will feel energetic for a short time after eating them, but after a little time feel tired, hungry and unable to concentrate.



If you think it will be difficult to remove unhealthy items from your child's lunchbox completely, you could use them as treat foods perhaps once a week. You could also try using snack sized chocolate treats or healthier crisps options, such as baked varieties.



**Keeping lunchbox cool:** During the warmer months, it can be a challenge to ensure your child's lunchbox is kept cool throughout the day. Coolbox lunchboxes and using ice packs can be a good idea. Rather than buying ice packs, you could freeze your child's drink the night before which will ensure their lunch and drink are both cool by lunchtime. Alternatively, make your child's sandwiches using frozen bread, which will have defrosted over the morning and be ready to eat by lunchtime.

**If you would like more information these websites have lots of useful information on healthy eating in general and have sections on packed lunches:**

<http://www.nhs.uk/Change4Life>

<http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell>

(under the healthy eating menu option on the left hand side)

### **A few packed lunch and recipe ideas**



#### **Fruity Cereal bars**

200g raw oats  
200g mixed dried fruit/chopped apricots/prunes/raisins  
100g no added sugar muesli (or crushed bran flakes, cornflakes or rice krispies) 2 egg whites  
4 tablespoons of clear honey  
200mls of Pure Apple Juice

1. Preheat the oven to gas mark 4 (180°C)
2. Mix the oats, muesli and dried fruit together in a bowl
3. Warm up the honey over a low heat until it is runny, then add it to the bowl along with the egg whites and apple juice and mix well
4. Press the mixture into a greased baking tin
5. Bake for 20-25 minutes until golden brown

### **Koukou (Iranian Omelette):**

This recipe is an example. You can use a variety of vegetables such as green beans, aubergine, courgette, and onion to make your own omelette. Lentils are also good options. Depending on the vegetables you use, you should steam, grill, or cook vegetables in boiling water in advance.



- 1 medium potato, peeled and boiled or your own choice of cooked vegetables
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoon olive oil
- A pinch of pepper/spice (optional)



1. Break the eggs into a bowl and whisk together using a fork
2. Add vegetables and potato to the egg mixture and combine
3. Add 2 teaspoons of olive oil to a frying pan and heat. Spread the olive oil around the pan, ensuring it is well covered. Turn the heat down to a medium heat
4. Add the mixture to the pan and spread all over
5. Cook on one side for 15 minutes
6. Cut the mixture to small pieces and flip over them over to cook the other side
7. Cook for 15 minutes or until the mixture is well cooked



### **Pasta in vegetable and tomato sauce**

Tomato sauce:

- 1 raw onion finely chopped
- 1 can of chopped tomatoes
- 2 teaspoons of tomato puree
- 4 tablespoons of frozen peas (or any other vegetables, e.g. peppers, sweetcorn etc)
- Dried or fresh herbs (optional)



**Note:** This sauce recipe will make enough sauce for 4 child sized portions of pasta. Try freezing the remainder for use another time. As a useful general rule, a pasta serving is 1 handful of dried pasta per child, and two handfuls per adult

1. Add a tablespoon of water and the onion to a saucepan and cook over a heat
2. Cook the onion, stirring regularly, until soft
3. Add the tinned tomatoes and tomato puree to the pan, stir together, leaving to simmer over a low heat for 10 minutes
4. Add the frozen peas straight into the pan and continue to simmer for a further 5 minutes
5. Finish off the sauce with a sprinkling of herbs
6. In another saucepan cover the pasta with the boiling water for up to 15 minutes (or follow the cooking instructions on the packet)
7. Drain the water from the pasta, mix into the sauce, and allow to cool

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Some images included in this appendix are from iStock.com:

Lunch box with sandwiches and fruits/Klenova

Turkey sandwich with wholegrain bread/Miflippo

Mexican fajitas burrito/Foodography

Two eggs isolated/Onairjiw

Two plastic yoghurt pots/Magone

Clear plastic water bottles with blue caps/Fertistockphoto

Bit chocolate bar with caramel/Grzegorz S

Pile of potato chips/Spaxiax

Puff cookie/VVZann

Cereals bar food diet/Picsfive

Ingredients pasta tomatoes basil/Olga Mitsova