

TOP 10 IDEAS FOR A HEALTHY BAG LUNCH

1. Sandwiches are always a popular favorite – but don't feel limited by the typical high-fat luncheon meat varieties. Most deli counters now carry many tasty, low-fat brands of turkey breast, chicken and ham. In addition, consider other options for sandwich fillers such as: hummus, lettuce, tomato and low-fat cheese or natural peanut butter topped with raisins and carrot shavings.
2. Always use whole-grain breads such as 100% whole wheat (look for whole wheat as the first ingredient – simply “wheat” means the item is not “whole”-grain) For a change, try 100% whole wheat pita bread – perfect for small hands.
3. Kids love color – so sneak in plenty of vegetables for a nutritious and filling side or snack. Slices of cucumber, peppers or cherry tomatoes are great alone, on sandwiches or with a low-fat dip. Add baby spinach leaves or lettuce leaves to sandwiches.
4. Fruit! Include at least one serving at lunch and another at snack. Try branching out to discover new favorites – along with apples and bananas try grapes, sliced pears, melon balls, unsweetened apple sauce cups, blueberries or pineapple.
5. Choose beverages carefully. Water, flavored seltzers (without added sugar or artificial sweeteners) or low-fat plain milk are best. Avoid soda, sweetened juice drinks or teas and if purchasing juice, stick with 100% and dilute with water or seltzer. Avoid heavily sweetened milks – especially those with greater than 20 grams of sugar per 8-ounce serving.
6. For a lighter lunch, try a yogurt parfait. Mix ½ cup plain yogurt with ½ cup vanilla yogurt and add fresh or frozen fruit. Try different toppings, such as different whole grain cereals or nuts. Pack the yogurt in a thermos and the toppings in a separate container or bag. (The healthiest cereals have less than 8 grams of sugar per serving and no partially hydrogenated oils on the ingredient list, such as Barbara's Puffins or Kashi Heart to Heart.)
7. Limit high-sugar, high-fat treats such as cookies, cakes and brownies. Healthier alternatives include baked chips, pretzels, whole wheat crackers and popcorn. Look for items without partially hydrogenated oils on the ingredient list, such as Kashi crackers.
8. Soup provides a warm, hearty meal that can really pack a nutritious punch. Choose varieties with lean protein (chicken, turkey, beef), beans, and veggies and pair with a slice of whole wheat bread or half a sandwich. Pack in a thermos - convenient and healthy.

9. When it comes to snacks, choose those with the least amount of processing, which will cut down on the added sugar and unhealthy fats. Instead, create your own "fast food" such as homemade trail mix (nuts, low sugar cereal and dried fruit), low fat cheese and whole grain crackers, slices of apple with natural peanut butter or apple sauce cups (no sugar added). For a lower sugar "treat", try graham crackers – Newman's Own brand is recommended because they do not contain hydrogenated oils.
10. Last but not least – allow your student to be involved in the picking and planning of their meals. Having their input means that they will be more likely to eat what is in their brown bags and may even surprise you by tempting their taste buds with a variety of healthier items.