



The Wellness Family

Dr. Paunicka Keeps You Informed

Healthy School Lunches

Parents today recognize the importance of feeding their children healthy nutritious foods. The problem is that the cafeteria has become just another franchise; foods aren't healthy and well-balanced. Vending machines offer chips, cookies, sodas – all kinds of other junk foods that children shouldn't be eating. This creates a challenge to parents that many have decided to ignore.

Assuming that it's a lost cause, some parents have rationalized that the rest of their meals are healthy and nutritious so why worry about what their children are eating for lunch. This is a dangerous misconception considering what is being served in the majority of school cafeterias.

What's being served?

Although programs have begun to appear over the past few years addressing the problem, the fact is that not much has changed. The majority of entrees served on school campuses are still full of additives, preservatives and carbohydrate rich. Many schools that have begun serving healthier options are getting complaints from the students that they're still hungry.

A 2009 investigation by USA Today found that meat served in U.S. schools wouldn't meet the quality or safety standards of fast-food restaurants. While school lunches have improved since Congress set higher standards in 2010, there is still a long way to go.

The Traditional Sandwich

Commonly found in the packed lunch is a sandwich; the problem is that bad choices can be made here as well. White bread bought at the store contains bleached flour. And don't be fooled by the word "enriched", as adding back a portion of the vitamins removed during the bleaching process doesn't undo the damage.

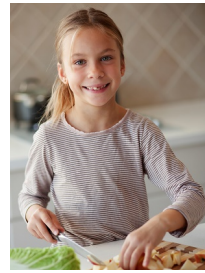
Additional poor sandwich choices include peanut butter which has hydrogenated oil; and as much as parents want to believe differently, jelly is not a source of fruit but is high in processed sugar. Pre-packaged, processed meats and cheeses should also be avoided as they are high in chemicals and salt.

Better sandwich choices include gluten-free bread and almond butter instead of peanut butter. Also, be creative. Try to put vegetables into a sandwich as much as possible.

Another great sandwich option is a healthy wrap. This can be done by purchasing gluten-free tortillas at any health food store and wrapping up healthier protein and vegetable sources. For instance, baked turkey or chicken with lettuce, cucumbers, sprouts, red peppers – maybe even some black beans sprinkled inside make a tasty protein.

Perfect Packing

Part of putting together a healthy packed lunch is having the right storage containers. Be sure to use an insulated lunch box that will hold up to four small food containers and a thermos.



No one knows better than your own child what they're going to eat, so let them help you prepare their lunches.

When purchasing the containers, you should buy at least two sets; this will help you to avoid having to wash them each night. As for the thermos, be sure that it is the wide mouth variety; this will be necessary if you wish to use it for beans or soup.

The Beverage

When it comes to healthy lunches, milk, juice and soda should be avoided at all cost. The *American Academy of Pediatrics* says that juice consumption is contributing to cavities and gastrointestinal issues for children. In a 2017 study, data revealed that children 2 to 18 years of age consume nearly half of their fruit intake as juice, which lacks dietary fiber and predisposes to excessive caloric intake.

The best choice is a stainless-steel bottle full of water. Add a few ice cubes and this will not only be a healthy beverage at lunch, but will also succeed in keeping the other items in the lunch box nice and cold.

The Entrée

Great sources of protein that can be put in a small lunch container are cubes of baked chicken, turkey or ham. This does not include processed meat that you buy at your grocery store. This should be roasted at home and cut into bite sized pieces. Remember that you can freeze

these in small portions and use them randomly over several weeks.

A hard-boiled egg is also a great source of protein. And don't forget that wide mouthed thermos you purchased; beans are an excellent source of protein and can be kept warm in that thermos. You may also consider providing your child with some of last night's stew heated up.

The Side Dishes

Most children don't consider a meal as lunch unless there are chips and cookies included; these must be avoided at all cost. The side dishes for your children should be tasty green vegetables; remember that greener is better.

Fruit is also a great side dish; but, while it is healthy, it is also a source of sugar and not as rich in vitamins and minerals as vegetables. Serve fruit just once for every five servings of vegetables. Remember that it should be fresh, organically grown fruit; fruit roll-ups are not fruit.

Also consider inviting your child to help you prepare vegetable soup or vegetarian chili. These can be put in a thermos and taken to school over the span of a week.

Another healthy option is a grain salad. This can include couscous or steamed long grain brown rice with chopped cucumbers, red peppers, baby carrots, or any other similar vegetable. You may also choose to marinate the chopped vegetables in a salad dressing for a few days prior to preparing the salad. Drain the vegetables and then mix them in. This will add moisture to the salad without having to add excess dressing.

Going Organic

Organically grown foods are slightly more expensive and worth it. The price of providing foods that are free of pesticides, growth hormones, hydrogenated oils and artificial additives and preservatives is high.

It's important to note that organic foods are also more filling. By providing your child with smaller portions of healthier foods you'll be spending the same amount of money without providing them with the cheaper foods. These cheaper foods are not just less expensive, they lack nutrition. You're paying less but you're getting less in return.

Create a Menu

No one knows better than your own child what they're going to eat, so let them help you prepare their lunches. Remember that if they like what their eating they will bring home an empty lunchbox.

The best way to accomplish this is to ensure that their options are healthy choices with variety. This can be made easy by creating a mix-and-match menu. Using a white board, poster board or similar display, draw out five columns and label them for each day of the week.

Then using color-coded post-it notes, index cards or by printing on colored paper, create a square for each lunch option. For example, their protein options would be on blue, vegetables would be on green and fruits would be on yellow.

Every Sunday, let your child help you prepare their menu by picking the appropriate cards and placing them in the column for each day. You and your child can then begin pre-packaging those options that can be frozen or stored for a few days.

In Summary

It's important that your children like their lunches but it's more important that their bodies get the vitamins, minerals and nutrients they need to develop and grow properly.



*Dear Patient,
Dr. Paunicka is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's overall health and wellness.*

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