Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Healthy lunchboxes

As parents or carers you play an important role in setting an example and teaching your children from a young age about choosing healthy food and drink. This will help them to have a nutritious diet that meets their growing needs and it can help make sure that they continue to eat healthily and stay a healthy weight as they get older.

Over the past 10 years, school food and drink has continued to become healthier.

There are now laws in Wales to make sure that schools play an important part in helping to keep our children healthy by offering meals that are balanced and nutritious, encouraging them to try a variety of new foods, and teaching them about healthy lifestyles.

Nearly all schools in Wales are part of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes, which aims to provide an environment that promotes health and well-being, including teaching children about the benefits of a healthy diet and an active lifestyle.

As part of this, we want to encourage healthy packed lunches for those children who bring food to school. This leaflet has handy hints and tips to help make sure that the contents of your child's lunchbox are as nutritious as the lunches served in schools in Wales.

Your child's school may have a policy on packed lunches. This leaflet supports any food policies already in place. Policies might not allow foods like sweets, chocolate bars, crisps and sugary drinks, and may ban certain foods (for example nuts) to protect pupils with an allergy. They may also encourage children to have at least one portion of fruit or vegetables, and to drink water.

Planning the lunchbox

Children need to eat the right amount of food for their age. Young children will need quite small portions of food and older children who are very active may need much larger amounts.

Top tips

You do not have to use foods produced specifically for lunchboxes. Some foods, such as meat or pasta, taste just as good cold. So how about cooking extra amounts for dinner, keeping the left overs in your fridge, then using them as part of your child's lunch to take to school the next day? You could plan lunches for the week in this way to help you to save money and reduce food waste.

To help you to find healthier options at the supermarket, look at nutrition labels on the front of packs and pick those which have amber or green traffic lights for fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt where possible.

Energy	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
780 kJ 185 kcal	3.5g	0.4g	1g	0.43g
9%	5%	2%	1%	7%

When adding fresh meat or any foods that are normally kept in the fridge, you should use an insulated lunchbox with an ice pack or include a frozen drink that could help to keep a lunchbox cool. If you prepare your child's lunch the night before, always store it in the fridge overnight.

Preparing the lunchbox

1 Start with starchy foods and carbohydrates

Starchy foods are a good source of energy and should make up around one-third of your child's lunchbox. You should try to include starchy foods like bread, pasta or potatoes, and vary your choices as much as possible.

Top tips

To offer something different to the traditional sandwich, you could give your child a bagel, pitta bread, a wrap or a baguette. Use brown, wholemeal or seeded varieties where possible and only use a small amount of vegetable based spread, such as sunflower spread, or reduced fat spread.

Breadsticks, oatcakes and wholemeal crackers are handy additions to a lunchbox and can be eaten with low-fat soft cheese or small cubes of reduced-fat hard cheese.

2 Add protein

Add a portion of food rich in protein, either on its own or as a sandwich filler.
Foods rich in protein include the following.

- **Chicken**
- **Eggs**
- **Lean meat**
- **Cheese**
- **Fish**
- **Beans, pulses and meat alternatives**

3 Add a couple of portions of fruit and vegetables to contribute towards your child's '5 a day'

There are many ways you can add fruit and vegetables to your child's lunchbox.

- **Children are drawn to brightly coloured fruit and vegetables and are much more likely to eat them if they are ready to eat, for example already peeled or cut into bite-sized pieces. Small fruits and vegetables, such as grapes and cherry tomatoes, should be cut into quarters for young children to reduce the risk of choking. You could also include some low-fat houmous or soft cheese for dipping.**
- **You could put salad in their sandwiches.**
- **You could make them a tasty fruit salad or include some canned fruit in natural fruit juice.**
- **You could include a handful of sultanas or a few dried apricots. To reduce the risk of tooth decay, dried fruit is best eaten at mealtimes.**

4 Dairy and alternatives

You could also include one of the following. Choose lower-fat and lower-sugar products where possible.

- **A plain yoghurt**
- **Fromage frais**
- **Low-fat soft cheese**

5 Drinks

Remember to include a drink.
Good choices include the following.

- **Water (although this will be available in school)**
- **Milk (semi-skimmed or skimmed for children aged over five)**
- **Pure unsweetened fruit juice (no more than 150ml)**

Crystal Mark 22594
Clarity approved by Plain English Campaign

WG31563 © Crown copyright 2019 OGL

For more information please read the Eatwell Guide available at
https://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/180927eatwell-guideen.pdf