

## Kids Enjoy Healthy Lunches

School is where children go to learn, play and develop skills that will last them a lifetime. Healthy eating helps children and teens grow, concentrate in school and have the energy to do the activities they like to do.

### **LUNCH Matters!**

Between grade one and the end of high school, a student may eat more than 2,400 lunches at school! Creating tasty, nutritious school lunches is a challenge for many parents. The good news is that with a little bit of planning and a few ideas, you can put together a lunch that not only tastes great, but also packs a nutritional punch! Try incorporating foods from all four of the food groups: vegetables and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives and meat and alternatives. Eating well with Canada's Food Guide recommends that kids eat at least one orange and one dark green vegetable a day, make 50% of grain products whole grain, have vegetables and fruit more often than juice and have meat alternatives such as beans, lentils and tofu often. Set goals with your child to try and meet these recommendations.

### **\*Plan ahead**

Part of the challenge of packed lunches is trying to decide what to prepare when you are in a rush in the morning. Taking the time to sit down and write out a lunch menu for next week can take the pressure off. Let your child help in writing it, so your child can choose from foods he or she likes. Focus on the four food groups of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating when planning lunches. Once you plan 3 weeks of lunches, use the menus over and over and you will save time and have lots of variety.

### **\*Do it together**

Get your pre-teen or teen to help with the shopping. Get them involved in helping to prepare their own lunches and they will be more likely to eat it! Let them choose some of the foods that go into their lunch bags. Make it fun by doing it together!

### **\*Get organized**

Speed up the preparation process by keeping lunch supplies (reusable containers, lunch bags or boxes, reusable drinking boxes, napkins and cutlery) together in one spot.

### **\*Mix it up**

Offer a variety of foods so that your child is not bored with bringing the same thing every day for lunch. Short on ideas? Try the following:

- Cheddar cheese, bagel, raw vegetables, yogurt, 100% fruit juice
- Whole grain tortilla filled with tuna salad, celery sticks, grapes, milk
- Cold pizza, yogurt, oatmeal muffin, 100% fruit juice
- Banana muffin, boiled egg, carrot sticks, milk
- Leftover pasta, meat sauce, melon cubes, milk
- Picnic Lunch: cut up cheese, leftover chicken or roast beef, whole grain roll, fruit salad, milk

In September 2011, 1300 students from 33 schools in the Western region of Newfoundland and Labrador completed a nutrition survey asking what they had for lunch that day. The results show that 35% of students had sugar-sweetened beverages, only 23% had milk and

52% did not have a fruit or a vegetable for their lunch. All children need healthy foods to learn, grow and do their best in school. We have an opportunity as parents to be role models for our children by adopting a healthy lifestyle that includes eating according to Canada's Food Guide and being physically active together. By packing a healthy lunch with your child, he or she will gain independence, be energized for the school day and look forward to opening their lunchbox.

For reliable nutrition information, go to the Dietitians of Canada website: [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca) .  
For more ideas on healthy lunches visit the Living Healthy Schools website: <http://www.livinghealthyschools.com/> . Ask your Community Health Nurse for a copy of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating to use for planning meals and snacks.

Written by Lesley French and Stephanie Buckle, Regional Nutritionists, Western Health