



Back to Healthy Basics for Back to School Lunch

American Heart Association Offers Healthy Lunchbox Tips

With summer coming to a close, it's almost that time for parents to start gearing up for the first day of school and planning back-to-school shopping 'must-haves.' After all of the new clothes and classroom supplies have been purchased, one of the last items parents shop for are groceries. This school year, the American Heart Association (AHA) is encouraging parents to make healthier school lunches a priority.

According to the AHA, there are several benefits to rethinking school lunch. Packing healthier lunchboxes means parents understand which nutritious foods their kids are eating. It can get students excited to adopt healthier habits. A nutritious lunch can also help curb childhood obesity, a trend that is declining slowly here in Michigan, according to the Vital Signs [report](#) released by the Center of Disease Control & Prevention earlier this month.

Here are some budget-friendly, creative ideas to keep children happy and healthy at lunchtime from the AHA:

Make a Smarter Sandwich

A slight switch to a sandwich can help make lunch healthier.

- Use different breads like 100% whole wheat tortilla wraps (choose wraps low in saturated and trans fats) or 100% whole wheat pita pockets.
- Besides lettuce, try shredded carrots or avocado slices with a turkey or lean roast beef sandwich.
- Buy store brand blocks of low fat, low sodium cheeses. You save money when you slice it yourself.
- Instead of lunchmeat, try leftover grilled chicken, lean pork or an egg white salad sandwich.

Love those Leftovers

Think about using the leftovers from a family favorite dinner for a next day lunch. Invest in a thermos to keep foods hot or cold until the lunch bell rings. Some ideas:

- Low sodium tomato, vegetable or bean soups
- Chili made with lean or extra lean ground meat or turkey
- Whole wheat spaghetti with low sodium tomato sauce
- Low sodium baked beans, bean casserole or beans & rice

Let Them Dunk

Sometimes letting your kids play with their food can be a good thing, especially when they are happy to get some extra nutrition. Try packing one of these fun dunks with dippers:

- Apple and pear slices to dip into low fat or non-fat plain yogurt mixed with peanut butter.
- Carrot, celery and sweet pepper strips to dip into hummus, fresh salsa or homemade bean dip.
- Unsalted sunflower seeds, crushed whole wheat cereal and sliced banana to mix into low fat vanilla yogurt (no added sugars) to eat with a spoon like a sundae.

Get Them Involved

While letting kids in the kitchen might mean a bigger mess, if they help pack their lunch, they're more likely to eat that lunch! On nights you have a bit more time, like a Sunday night, have them choose which piece of fruit or what type of bread they want and let them assemble their lunch. Make this a weekly routine – it's another great way to spend family time together.

For more information on healthy foods for kids, money-saving grocery options, guidelines and much more, visit www.heart.org.

To read the CDC's *Vital Signs* report on obesity in children, visit www.cdc.gov.

About the American Heart Association

The American Heart Association is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary health organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. Our mission is to build healthier lives by preventing, treating and defeating these diseases – America's No. 1 and No. 3 killers. We fund cutting-edge research, conduct lifesaving public and professional educational programs, and advocate to protect public health. To learn more or join us in helping all Americans, call 1-800-AHA-USA1 or visit americanheart.org

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