

Pack a Lunch for School or Work

While I am away on maternity leave, my newsletters will still be published monthly in the form of "Best of Jessica's Nutrition Notes." I am including past articles that have been popular and are also relevant to the themes of pregnancy and parenthood. Since September is the month that most children go back to school, it is an important time to give their meals away from home some thorough consideration. Even if you don't have children, the principles of meal planning that I explain in this article are still relevant for adults, since everyone thrives on eating well-balanced, minimally processed meals. I hope that this newsletter will be useful for you whether you are packing your own lunch for work or your child's lunch for school.

Parents! What's for lunch today? Don't let someone else decide for your child; work with your kids to determine what they will eat for lunch and then prepare it together. Children need to be well-nourished for proper growth and development and for optimal learning. That's an important job that no one can do better than you. Unless you put some thought into it, though, your kid's lunch box could make the cafeteria lady seem like Julia Child.

There are six essential components to be put into your child's lunch box: 1) the protein, 2) the whole grain, 3) the vegetable, 4) the fruit, 5) the beverage, and 6) the fun kid food. Notice that salt, sugar and fat are not essential or even recommended. Unfortunately, most packed lunches look like a sugar-salt-fat bonanza in a box instead of a nutritious balanced meal that will help prime children for learning, energy, growth and health. Although children consider teachers to be their primary source of nutrition information, they still learn a lot from you. In fact, they learn more than



you think just by watching your example. If you carelessly send them to school with a *Lunchables* in their hands, that is what they will learn is a lunch. On the other hand, by spending a few minutes with your child to decide on each of these six components, you will be teaching your child about what a healthy and balanced lunch really is (and you may learn a few things yourself).

1 The Protein

The protein may come from an animal source or be vegetarian. Whether it is turkey or black beans, the protein is essential for providing amino acids, B vitamins, zinc and other minerals that help promote growth. The protein should generally be lean (with the exception of eggs, nuts and nut butters),



Gelson's registered dietitian, Jessica Siegel, has a Masters in Public Health. However, she is not a doctor and her nutritional recommendations are not tailored to specific health problems. Consult your physician before beginning any nutritional program. To contact Jessica, please call her at 1-800-GELSONS.

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since the fat in meats like salami and bologna are mostly saturated. It is preferable to buy minimally-processed lunch meats that do not contain additives like nitrates and nitrites, which may be carcinogenic. Fish contains important omega-3 fatty acids and other nutrients for children, but that must be a limited source of protein; up to six ounces of fish a week is recommended, with a limit of three ounces of light tuna. Most white tuna is not recommended (unless it comes from small, young troll/pole-caught fish), but if your child eats any, they should eat no more than three ounces and have no other fish for a week afterwards. If your child doesn't eat any white tuna, then they can eat up to six ounces of low-mercury fish, such as shrimp, wild salmon, black cod, pollock, catfish, scallops, mahi mahi, tilapia and crab each week. A good resource for understanding fish recommendations for kids is the Environmental Defense Fund's seafood selector at www.edf.org.



2 The Whole Grain

Whole grains are your child's main source of long-lasting energy that allows them to play hard and work hard. They contain fiber, vitamins B-6 and E, zinc, magnesium and phytonutrients that may reduce the risks of cancer, diabetes and high cholesterol. Whole grains are filling, unlike refined grains, so they aid in calorie control, which is important in the struggle against overweight. As a family, try to work towards making all of your complex carbohydrate choices whole grain by choosing more oatmeal, barley, quinoa, brown rice, corn and flourless sprouted whole-grain bread. Sandwiches are an obvious and easy choice for combining a whole grain with a protein, but you can also pack leftovers from last night's dinner, like stir-fried chicken and veggies with brown rice.

3 The Vegetable

The vegetable usually necessitates a little work and a lot of patience on your part, but don't give up! Children require an average of ten exposures to a food before they really decide that they will eat it. If they see you eating vegetables, they will be much more likely to eat them themselves. Try growing your own vegetables with your kids and get them involved in vegetable preparation at mealtimes. The vegetables can go in the sandwich or on the side or preferably both. Vegetables contain vital nutrients and fiber that are important for overall health, development and disease prevention. Remember that children ages four to eight need at least one and a half cups

of vegetables a day, while children over eight and teens need two to three cups a day.

4 The Fruit

This one shouldn't be a struggle, but it can be with some kids. The same strategies apply for getting kids to eat fruits as with vegetables. Fruit supplies antioxidants like vitamin C and beta carotene, as well as many other phytonutrients that protect health and boost the immune system. It is also an important source of fiber and carbohydrates. Sliced and dried fruits can be added to sandwiches and whole and freshly cut fruits can be served on the side. Children age four to eight need at least one to one and a half cups of fruit a day while children over eight and teens need one and a half to two cups a day.

5 The Beverage

Beverage choices are a source of huge controversy these days. Personally, I think water is the best option, but milk and juice also have their place. Soft drinks, however, should not be a regular part of a child's diet, no matter if they are regular or diet. Children need to stay hydrated throughout the day and school drinking fountains should not be their only source of fluids at school. A clean, reusable stainless steel water bottle or a new unopened plastic bottle is an important daily accompaniment. Milk should always be organic and only be nonfat or 1% fat. After age two, children don't need the saturated fat that whole or 2% milk provides. Fruit juice can count as one serving

of fruit if your child does not eat fresh fruit, but it must be 100% fruit juice and a serving is just six ounces.

6 The Fun Kid Food

This is the "treat" that makes being a kid fun and makes adults feel like they are kids again. You don't want to leave the treat out of the lunch box because then your child will feel deprived and out of place at school. You really don't need to leave it out either, because I have found many healthier versions of the typical fun foods that can actually promote health rather than detract from it. "Treat" foods can still be nutritious and low in fat, salt and sugar, especially if they are eaten in moderation, i.e. once a day. The fun kid food in the lunch box can be sweet or savory, like chips or cookies. Look at my Back to School Shopping List on the back of this newsletter and you will find baked organic blue corn tortilla chips, organic string cheese, all-fruit fruit strips, and minimally processed cookies. Your kids will still benefit from the joys of being a kid and you will feel good about packing them a healthy treat that they'll enjoy.

To help you pack fantastic lunches for your family, I've developed a bunch of healthful recipe ideas for sandwiches, wraps and quesadillas. With this knowledge under your belt, you can send your child to school with confidence and you may even consider taking a balanced and nutritious lunch to work with you, too!

Healthful Recipe Ideas

TURKEY SALAD WRAPS

Serves: 3

Ingredients:

- 9 ounces *Gelson's* Carving Cart turkey breast, chilled and cubed
- 5 tablespoons *Gelson's Finest* mild salsa
- 3 tablespoons *Horizon Organic* plain nonfat yogurt
- 1/3 organic avocado, diced
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon white pepper
- 3 *Food for Life* Ezekiel organic sprouted grain tortillas
- 3 romaine lettuce leaves
- 3 slices *Horizon Organic* American cheese

Directions:

Combine the turkey with salsa and yogurt. Mix well. Add avocado and season with salt and pepper. Mix gently to combine. Place a lettuce leaf and a slice of cheese on each tortilla. Spoon one third of turkey salad on each tortilla. Fold over top and bottom edges of tortilla and roll right edge towards the left to wrap. Wrap snugly in wax paper or aluminum foil.

EGG SALAD SANDWICHES

Serves: 3

Ingredients:

- 6 *Gelson's Finest* organic omega-3 eggs, hardboiled and cooled
- 5 tablespoon *Horizon Organic* plain nonfat yogurt
- 2 tablespoons onion, minced
- 2 tablespoons celery, minced
- 2 tablespoons fresh dill, minced
- 1/8 teaspoon white pepper
- 9 sprigs watercress or other lettuce, stems discarded
- 1 large organic tomato, thinly sliced
- 6 slices *Milton's* healthy whole-wheat bread

Directions:

While eggs are cooling, mix the yogurt, onion, celery, dill, and pepper together. Refrigerate until eggs are cool. Peel eggs and cut them in half. Discard two yolks and mash the remaining four yolks into the dressing. Dice the egg whites and mix them into the dressing. Arrange two tablespoons watercress leaves and three slices tomato on one side of each sandwich. Scoop a half cup of egg salad on top and cover with other slice of bread.

FIESTA QUESADILLA

Serves: 1

Ingredients:

- 1 slice *Horizon Organic* cheddar cheese
- 1 *Food for Life* Ezekiel organic sprouted grain tortilla
- 1 tablespoon fresh tomato, diced
- 1 tablespoon *Lindsay* sliced black olives, drained and rinsed
- 1 tablespoon *Westbrae Organic* black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 tablespoon corn kernels, fresh or canned
- 1 tablespoon diced avocado or guacamole
- 1 tablespoon *Gelson's Finest* mild tomato salsa

Directions:

Place a slice of cheese on one half of the tortilla. Spread some tomatoes, olives, black beans, corn, and avocado on top of the cheese. Fold tortilla in half. Place on a paper plate or paper towel and microwave on high for 30–45 seconds. Slice in four pieces and top with fresh salsa.

TUNA SALAD

Serves: 4

Ingredients:

- 2 6-ounce cans *Rincon Gold* no salt added premium tuna in water, not drained
- 1/2 cup *Horizon Organic* plain nonfat yogurt
- 2 tablespoons *Melissa's* organic onion, finely minced
- 1 1/2 green onions, green parts only, thinly sliced
- 2 heaping tablespoons *Newman's Own* organic dried cranberries
- 1/2 Granny Smith apple, diced small with the skin
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 8 slices *Food for Life* Ezekiel cinnamon raisin bread

Directions:

In a medium bowl, combine tuna with juices, yogurt and onions. Use a fork to combine ingredients and break up the tuna. Stir in the cranberries and apple pieces and season with salt. Divide tuna among four slices of bread and cover with remaining four slices.

TURKEY ROLL-UPS

Serves: 1

Ingredients:

- 1 slice *Milton's* healthy whole-grain bread, crusts cut off
- 1 wedge *Laughing Cow* light cheese
- 2 slices *Applegate Farms* smoked turkey breast
- 1 romaine lettuce leaf
- 1 thin slice tomato
- 2 thin slices avocado

Directions:

Use a rolling pin to flatten out the bread. Spread one wedge of *Laughing Cow* cheese on the flattened bread. Lay turkey and lettuce on top. Place tomato and avocado on the bottom part of the bread (the part nearest you). Carefully roll up the sandwich, starting with the tomato end. Gently pat it down so that it sticks together. Slice roll into three pinwheels.

Back to School Shopping List

Jessica has hand-selected this list of healthful and delicious foods that children can take to school with them as part of a well-balanced lunch. Remember to read labels since individually packaged foods often contain more than one serving, despite looking small.

PROTEINS

Applegate Farms turkey or roast beef
Arrowhead Mills organic peanut butter
Boar's Head turkey or chicken breast
(selected nitrate-free varieties)
Deming's canned salmon
Edamame
Fage Total 2% or fat-free Greek yogurt
Gelson's Finest organic omega-3 eggs
Gelson's Finest carving cart turkey breast
Horizon Organic cheddar cheese
Kettle almond butter
Maisie Jane's almond butter
Rincon Gold no salt added tuna in water
(up to 3 ounces a week of this lowest mercury tuna)
Tribe organic hummus dip
Westbrae Organic black beans or lentils

FUN KID STUFF

Barbara's Bakery Snackimals
Bare Fruit organic apple chips
Clif Kid organic twisted fruit
Crunchies freeze-dried fruit
Edamame
Flanigan Farms trail mix
Gelson's Finest Salsa
Guiltless Gourmet organic baked corn tortilla chips
Horizon Organic American cheese singles or string cheese
Kashi TLC chewy trail mix bars
Kozy Shack pudding packs
Laughing Cow light cheese bites
Mareblu Naturals nut crunches
Mi-Del ginger snaps
Mrs. May's Naturals nut crunches
Newman's Own organic raisin mini packs
Newman's Own organic spelt pretzels
North Coast organic applesauce
Organic Valley string cheese
Pavich organic raisins
Santa Cruz Organic applesauces
Seapoint Farms dry roasted edamame
Stonyfield Farms organic Yo Baby yogurt
Stretch Island fruit leather

CONDIMENTS

Follow your Heart Veganaise
Tiger Tiger Old Major Grey's mango chutney
French's yellow mustard
Heinz organic tomato ketchup
Horizon Organic plain nonfat yogurt
Sarabeth's spreadable fruit jam
Lindsay sliced black olives

WHOLE GRAIN CARBOHYDRATES

Food for Life Ezekiel sprouted grain tortillas
Food for Life flourless sprouted whole-grain breads
Kashi TLC Crackers
La Tortilla Factory hand-made style corn tortillas
Milton's healthy whole-grain or whole-wheat breads
Newman's Own organic spelt pretzels
Thomas' Sahara whole-wheat pitas

VEGETABLES (preferably organic)

Avocado
Bell pepper strips
Broccoli florets
Carrot sticks or baby carrots
Carrots for shaving or shredding
Celery sticks
Cherry tomatoes
Cucumbers
Lettuce
Sugar snap peas
Tomatoes for slicing

FRUIT (preferably organic)

Apples
Bananas
Blueberries
Grapes
Kiwis
Melon balls
Oranges
Plums
Strawberries
Any other whole or cut up fresh fruit

BEVERAGES

Bottled water
Horizon Organic milk single packs
Hansen's Junior Juice
Mott's mini apple juice
O.N.E. coconut water
R.W. Knudsen organic juice
Vita Coco coconut water

ACCOUTREMENTS

Insulated lunch box
Ice pack
Napkins
Plastic utensils
Hand sanitizer
Moist towelettes travel pack
Glad sandwich bags