

News Column for week of August 21, 2017

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Packing a Healthy Lunch

Packing a lunch can get boring and no one wants to eat the same thing day after day. Whether you are packing lunches for yourself, your partner, or your children, here are some strategies that will make packing lunches quicker and healthier.

Healthy dinners including vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein make great leftovers that can be taken for lunch the next day. Just remember to make extra to take for lunch! Also, some leftovers like cooked chicken breast can be chopped up and added to a salad or sliced and made into a sandwich. Use an ice pack to keep your lunch cold until lunchtime if you don't have access to a fridge. Try heating soups up in the morning and taking them with you in a thermos if you don't have a way to heat them up at lunchtime.

Make half your lunch fruits and vegetables. This could include a salad, cut fresh vegetables and fruit, a hearty vegetable soup, or vegetables on a sandwich. Get creative! Apples, pears, peaches, plums, oranges, and bananas are perfect for sack lunches since they are already packaged in their skin, rind, or peel—no preparation is required! Strawberries, blueberries, and cherries are also great in sack lunches but need to be washed and put in a container. For kids, slice apples and cut oranges so the fruit is easier for them to eat.

Include low-fat dairy foods like yogurt, milk, or a cheese stick in your lunch to increase the protein and calcium. Try mixing up your protein by packing beans, nuts, hummus, chicken, turkey, seafood, or lean beef or pork. Getting enough protein at lunchtime will help you feel full and satisfied.

Include healthy snack foods. Fruit rolls, cookies, and bags of chips are common sack lunch additions that satisfy cravings for sweet and salty foods. Instead of fruit rolls or cookies, try adding fresh fruit, dried fruit, or 100% fruit leather to satisfy your sweet tooth. Healthier options than bags of chips are cut fresh vegetables with hummus or low fat dip, whole grain crackers, or vegetable chips—these should provide some satisfying crunch in your sack lunch. These foods also make great snacks to pack with your lunch for a morning or afternoon snack.

As a time-saving measure in the mornings, many fruits and veggies can be prepped a few days ahead and pre-packaged to grab quickly and easily when putting your lunch together. Nuts and other easy-to-grab snacks can also be handy to include. Creating a “lunch station” in the refrigerator can save time in the mornings by keeping lunch food separated and easy to find. It also can help you keep track of lunch supplies and when you need to re-stock.

Packing healthy lunches for you or your family doesn't have to be hard or time consuming. With a little planning and preparation, you can ensure that everyone will be full, satisfied, and have plenty of energy for afternoon activities.

For more information about foods and nutrition, contact Kathy in the Southwind Extension District office at 620-365-2242 or by email at kmcewan@ksu.edu.