

Healthy
Lunch-
BOX
ideas for
children



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

The National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) offers one meal that must be served to learners before ten o'clock. This is not enough to supply rapidly growing children with their nutritional needs to participate fully in all activities (learning and extra-curricular). It is very important for parents/guardians to pack nutritious lunchboxes that will eliminate childhood obesity and behavioural problems that are caused by eating too much/the wrong types of food.



It can be a challenge for parents/guardians to come up with interesting lunchboxes that will entice children to eat healthily at school. The importance of eating healthily, particularly during school hours, cannot be underestimated. A healthy lunchbox should help to improve a child's attention, behaviour and learning throughout the day and into the afternoon.



Food groups

Let the food groups provide the framework for the lunchbox and ensure that foods from every food group are included – the challenge is to get the children to eat it!



Healthy diet

We know that a healthy diet should incorporate a variety of foods:



- Lean cold meats, grilled chicken pieces, boiled eggs, minced meat, legumes, etc. for building muscles and to keep children alert



- Whole-wheat or brown bread/buns/rye bread, rice cakes, baked potato, green mealies, whole-wheat muffins, etc. for slow-release energy



- Milk, yoghurt, cheese, cheese spread, maas, etc. for healthy bones and teeth



- Fruit and vegetables for good health, growth and the maintenance of body structure



- Low-fat spread, avocado, olives, peanut butter, nuts, etc. to serve as building blocks for the membrane that makes up the outer border of every cell in the body

Lunchbox Tips

Tip 1

Packing is important. Use a sturdy, plastic container that is big enough to accommodate the food you want your child to take to school without getting squashed. Consider investing in a small, non-breakable vacuum flask or vacutainer for keeping cold foods and drinks cold, and hot food and drinks hot.



Tip 2

Make eating fruit fun. Most children will leave food that takes a lot of effort to eat, since they want a quick refueling stop, leaving maximum time for the playground! Peel naartjes/oranges and cover with cling wrap, or make colourful skewers with bite-size pieces of fruit.



Tip 3

Save time. Lunches can be prepared the night before to save time in the morning. Prepare pasta salads, sandwich fillings, coleslaw or include something from last night's dinner, such as soup in a flask or chicken kebabs.



Tip 4

Resist 'easy' options/children's demands or manipulations. To buy high-fat snacks, fizzy drinks, chocolate bars, etc. will ruin your child's health in the long run. If your child likes crisps but you don't want him/her to fill up by eating a whole bag, put some in a small bag or wrap some crisps in foil.



Tip 5

Cut down on junk. Avoid too many processed foods, as they tend to contain few nutrients and too much salt, sugar, additives and saturated fat.



Tip 6

Children differ from adults. They have small stomachs, so they need regular snacks and some have a much higher energy requirement because they are more active.



Tip 7

Children are similar to adults. They also like interesting and tasty food that looks good enough to eat, but they may not appreciate very sophisticated food



Tip 8

Involve your child in planning. Give him/her a chance to choose and prepare his/her lunchbox, with your guidance.



Tip 9

Add a personal touch. Tuck a surprise like a note or stickers in your child's lunchbox or hide a special treat at the bottom. Pack fun napkins, draw a face on a banana with a marker pen or cut sandwiches into novelty shapes using cookie cutters. At the weekend it's a good idea to get your child involved in the kitchen making things like muffins which he/she can take to school the following week.

