

Healthy Ideas for School Lunches

Kids are smart and want to feel good. They deserve a healthy lunch and will eat a healthy lunch! If your kids are used to school lunches or lots of packaged foods, this transition may take some time, but it will be worth it! Think of color and texture when you put your lunches together. It can take a child 15 tastes of a food before they like it. If they have eaten mostly processed foods, their taste buds will be changed. They need to be away from those foods to detox their taste buds and they will start to love healthy foods. Give it time and know that you are healing them and setting them up for a healthy life to come!

Dips:

Hummus, baba ghanoush, salsa, guacamole (see recipe below). Any of these can be homemade or store bought. You might have to try a few to find a brand you like. Watch for too much added salt. Here are two other choices your kids might love: cashew cheese sauce (see recipe below) and healthier ranch dip (see recipe below)!

Veggies:

Any and all! Try cutting them into fun shapes (keep the extras in the freezer for soups and stews), think about lots of color. Some veggies are easier for kids to eat because they are less bitter. Start with those: carrot, cucumber, sugar snap peas, zucchini. If some veggies are too bitter for your kids, try steaming them for a bit (don't let them get soggy!) and shock them by putting them into ice water right away. This will stop the cooking process and retain the color. Experiment with different preparations. For example, my kids wouldn't eat cucumber until I peeled it. The peel was tough and bitter. Now they love it and use them instead of crackers for dipping in hummus. Prep your veggies on Sundays so they are ready for the week.

Fruit:

Any and all! If you slice them, you'll need to do that the morning of, so they don't oxidize too much. For sliced apples, add lemon to keep fresh and sprinkle with cinnamon. Berries, grapes, and cherries are easy. Avoid raisins and raisins (too much added and/or condensed sugar) and avoid processed fruit products (fruit roll ups, etc.). A gut-healthy snack is ½ cup grass fed plain yogurt topped with berries and gluten free granola. The berries will give it a healthy sweet boost.

Bread Alternatives:

Udi's brand multi-grain bread, brown rice tortillas, organic (non-GMO) corn tortillas, gluten free crackers or pretzels for hummus, etc. Be cautious about gluten free products. Many of them contain high amounts of starches as binders. Starches can spike blood sugars higher than regular bread. Read your labels and look for the fewest and healthiest ingredients and think of these more as an occasional food, not a staple. If you find gluten free bread is something your children and teens won't touch, go for higher end bread that is non-GMO and organic. This will ensure pesticides and other toxins like glyphosate are not in there.

Instead of Peanut Butter and Jelly:

Try sunflower seed butter or other nut butter, if allowed. At many schools, nuts are not allowed in lunches. We love sunflower seed butter as an alternative. When you look for jelly, look for organic and with the few ingredients possible. We make a 'jam' by cooking frozen fruit and blending. No sugar needed! You can add a bit of non-GMO cornstarch to make it thicker (mix ¼ t cornstarch with 1T water and then add to the blended berries). Let it cool and store it in the fridge.

Smoothies:

Use Arbonne's Protein Shake mix and blend with unsweetened almond milk or coconut milk or water and frozen fruits with spinach or kale. I promise you they won't taste the spinach! I make about an 8 oz serving for my kids.

Bean salads:

Keep this super simple! Mix one can of beans with a cup or more of chopped veggies and mix in some herbs. Pick whatever veggies your kids like best to start. Chop the veggies small so they are similar in size to the beans. Here are some of my favorite combos:

- Black beans mixed with peppers, avocado, and tomato with a sprinkle of cumin
- White (cannellini) beans with olives, sundried tomatoes and a bit of rosemary or basil
- Kidney beans with zucchini, carrots, and tomato and a sprinkle of chili powder Some of these herbs and spices can take time for you kids to enjoy. Keep trying!

What to avoid:

Packaged food (processed foods, lunchables, etc.)

Any colors (noted by a color and a code Red 40, Yellow 5)

Sports drinks and sodas (choose water or unsweetened almond or coconut milk)

Desserts, candy, cookies, treats

Chips or other fried snack foods

Ketchup (very high in sugar. Did you know there are 3 teaspoons of sugar in every tablespoon?)

Processed meats (try leftovers from cooking dinner instead)

Toaster pastries/pop-tarts

Cereals (especially sugared and colored cereals. All are either high in sugar or convert to sugar very quickly in the body)

Artificial Sweeteners (look for products labeled low sugar. They are usually lower in refined sugar but contain artificial sweeteners)

See next page for recipes

Recipes:

Cashew Cheese Sauce:

1/3 cup raw cashews

1/4 cup nutritional yeast (different from baking yeast - found at most grocery stores in the natural or health food section)

1 cup unsweetened non-dairy milk (almond is our favorite)

1/4 cup vegetable broth

1 tsp salt

2 T lemon juice

In a blender or high-speed processor, process the cashews until they turn to a fine powder. Add the nutritional yeast and non-dairy milk and process. Transfer to a saucepan and add the broth salt and lemon juice. Heat over medium heat, stirring until hot and slightly thickened, about 7 minutes. Use less or no broth for a thicker sauce. (This is great over brown rice pasta for a mac and cheese alternative!)

For school lunches, this can be made on Sunday and served cold with lunch as a dip.

Healthier Ranch Dip/Dressing:

Homemade Ranch Seasoning (dry mix):

2 TBS dried parsley

1 1/2 tsp dried dill weed

2 tsp garlic powder

2 tsp onion powder

2 tsp dried onion flakes (If you don't have this just double the onion powder)

1 tsp ground black pepper

1 tsp dried chives

1 tsp salt

Ranch Dressing:

Use a 13.5oz can (full fat) coconut milk or grass fed, plain yogurt. The coconut milk separates (fat & liquid) so mix/blend them back together. Squeeze in 1/2 lemon and 1/4 tsp salt and mix (voila, sour cream!). Then add 1-2 TBS of ranch seasoning mix above, according to taste. Shake/blend and refrigerate. Try using a recycled mason jar.

Guacamole:

5 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro 1/4 cup minced white onion (can skip for kids) pinch of salt

6 medium or 4 large avocados (about 3 pounds total), halved, pitted and mashed with a fork

1 medium tomato, cored, chopped

3 tablespoons fresh lime juice

1 teaspoon lime zest

Blend all and enjoy! Adjust seasonings if necessary.