

Pack school lunches that are healthy and fun

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Pediatrician offers tips on nutritious foods that kids will like.

(HealthDay)—Packing nutritious and fun school lunches can help children achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Here are some tips for parents from Dr. William Gillespie, a pediatrician and chief medical officer at New York City-based EmblemHealth.

- **Give your children a choice.** If they get to decide what's in their lunch, they're more likely to eat it. Just make sure their choices are all healthy, such as apples, bananas, carrots or celery.
- **Add dip to make vegetables more fun for kids.** A quick dip can be made with plain non-fat yogurt and garlic powder (or any other seasoning your child likes).
- **Make mini-kabobs by cubing low-sodium deli chicken or turkey and low-fat cheese.** Place the cubes on pretzel sticks. You can also use grape tomatoes and green grapes.
- **Use whole-wheat bread instead of white bread.** Whole-wheat

pita or tortillas are other healthy options. Let your child make a "face" on their sandwich with ingredients such as hummus, low-fat cream cheese and cut-up vegetables.

Presentation makes a difference in how much food appeals to kids, Gillespie noted. Children are more likely to eat things in smaller, bite-size pieces or slices. Slice sandwiches into four squares. Cut up an apple or create a fruit cup with pieces of different melons.

When it comes to warm foods in a thermos, try a healthy macaroni and cheese with whole-wheat pasta and some small broccoli florets. A three-bean chili with carrots and zucchini is another healthy option.

Make sure your child's lunch includes a good source of calcium, such as yogurt, smoothies, low-fat string cheese or low-fat milk.

Water is a better choice than [sugary drinks](#) such as juices and sodas. If your child likes something crunchy, give them baked chips, low-fat popcorn or whole-grain crackers.

Ask if your child's school has restrictions on what students are allowed to bring for lunch. For example, many schools don't allow peanut butter. Remember to use an ice pack to keep cold foods cold.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more about [childhood nutrition](#).

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