

Brown-bagging it? Think outside the box

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(HealthDay)—At lunchtime, it's easy to fall into a rut. To jazz up this midday meal for your kids or yourself, take some brown-bagging tips from a registered dietitian.

Keep things interesting through variation, said Samantha Coogan, an instructor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. A healthy lunch can be delicious and affordable, she said. Here are some of her suggestions:

- If you're a parent, try to add a new fruit or vegetable each week for your child to try.
- Think beyond the supermarket.

You might save money by buying fresh [fruit](#) and vegetables at dollar stores and discount markets, Coogan said.

- Pack more than lunch. College students often get hungry during long classes. It's smart to pack both your lunch and enough snacks to get you through the day, Coogan said.
- Watch those organic labels. You might assume that "organic" produce is 100 percent organic, but advertisers can get away with using that label on products that are less than half organic, Coogan said. Be careful to make sure you're not paying more without getting a full organic product to show for it.
- Don't assume gluten-free is better for you. Gluten-free products aren't necessarily healthy, Coogan said. They're made for people whose bodies have a hard time processing gluten proteins in wheat, she said.
- Watch the [sugar](#) to avoid the afternoon blahs. "To stay alert and productive during the second half of your day, avoid extra sugar," Coogan said. "Whether brown-bagging it or ordering out, minimize the soda, cookies and other sweets. The greater the processed [sugar intake](#), the harder the afternoon crash." Fruit paired with a protein or fat like peanut butter will keep you going without the need for a caffeine boost, she said.

More information: SOURCE: University of Nevada, Las Vegas, press release, Aug. 30, 2017

For more tips for a healthy lunch, see the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#).

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