

Lunch box ideas

It is not only half of the UK adult population that is overweight; we are the European country with the highest figures of childhood obesity. Recent statistics reveal that one in every four preschool children is overweight. Children lead by example. Are we as adults the food icons our children need?

It is said that about 20% of the UK workforce skip lunch. So what do we eat at lunchtime? Do we rely on high fat sandwiches and fizzy drinks and crisps? A healthy balanced lunch is not just a requirement for children; adults need to be the examples.

Many workplaces have catering facilities in the form of a cafeteria that offer food and beverages. Popular lunch providers are sandwich and coffee shops, supermarkets or even mobile sandwich shops. Do you envy your colleagues who always manage to bring along their own homemade lunch box?

Preparing your own lunch box only requires some planning and preparation time and need not take more than 5 minutes.

Planning is pivotal to doing your own lunch boxes. Make sure you have the necessary ingredients on your shopping list!

Here are a few guidelines on how to sneak good, nutritious food into lunch boxes.

- **Base the lunchbox on a portion of starchy food:** Wholemeal bread, pita pockets, wraps, bagels, rice cakes, oatcakes, crispbreads, plain popcorn, breadsticks, scones, rice salad, pasta, potato or cous-cous salad. A lunch box needn't consist of only sandwiches, experiment with different types of bread. Rice, pasta, potatoes and cous-cous make up delicious hot and cold meals that are also an opportunity to add plenty of vegetables and fruit.
- **Include fruit and vegetables:** Easy to eat fruit and vegetables are the answer. Examples are apples, satsumas, cherries, grapes, small box of raisins, small pots of fruit salad or dried fruit, or small tins of fruit in natural juice, vegetable sticks, cherry tomatoes, mini vegetables such as sugar snaps and baby corn.
- **Add a portion of milk or dairy food:** Use low-fat crème fraiche or low-fat cream cheese as a spread. Although cheese is an easy and versatile sandwich and lunch box ingredient, try not to have cheese daily! If you have suitable cooling facilities add a pot of yoghurt.
- **Include a portion of lean meat, fish or alternative.** Experiment with different lean cold meats such as ham, chicken and beef. Tinned tuna always makes for an easy option. Prawns make a good low fat option or use flaked mackerel to ensure you have one portion of oily fish per week. Other good sources of protein for a lunch box include egg, houmous, bean and lentil salad.
- **Remember a drink!** Keeping hydrated helps to keep us alert. Include a small bottle of still, sparkling or flavoured water. Although they are expensive, buying in bulk from a supermarket does make a saving. Many workplaces do have filtered water machines. Take your own diluted low-sugar squash and make up your drinks as the day goes on. Instead of a portion of fruit, place a small carton of fruit juice in the freezer the night before to ensure a cold drink the next day.

Making your own lunch box is a great way to step up on healthy eating. It is also a great saving. If you spend £4 a day on lunch and instead you make your own for £2, this equates to a saving of 300 pounds a year!