

Will your child's lunch make the grade?

By Haley Fulkerson Living Well Jul 28, 2016

Do you make the grade when you pack your child's lunch?

You're not just feeding your child's body when you pack their lunch. You're also feeding their mind. Research consistently shows children perform better in school with proper nutrition. Many parents choose to pack their child's lunch and this can be a great option with some planning and preparation.

Many parents wonder how to pack healthful meals while not ending up wasting food or having to spend large amounts of time packing lunch. If you're looking for ideas, or for other back-to-school resources, come to Owensboro Health's free Back to School signature event held in partnership with the Owensboro Regional Farmers Market. The event will feature live music, healthy snacks, food recipes and snack information, free bike helmets, giveaways and more (while supplies last). Join us for this event from 8 a.m. to noon Saturday in the north parking lot of the Owensboro Health Wound Center at the corner of Triplett Street and East Parrish Avenue.

Here are a few tips and tricks to consider when packing a lunch for your child:

Pick and choose

School-age children should play a part in the decision-making process. Let them choose between grapes or an orange, whole wheat bagel or whole wheat tortilla, etc. Letting them have a say in what is packed will empower them while making it more likely they will eat what is packed. At the same

time, packing lunch together becomes a teachable moment on good nutrition and how their bodies will benefit from healthful choices.

Mix it up

Pack favorite foods along with new foods to try. Peer influence can be a huge advantage for you. If a friend likes it chances are good your child may try it. Make it fun! Cut shapes out of foods -- stars out of watermelon, hearts out of cheese, you get the idea.

Serve the right size

Portion size and moderation is crucial to healthful eating too -- yes you can pack a cookie in your child's lunch box but it is not a good idea to pack several. Avoid packing foods with empty calories such as fruit snacks, granola bars and chips. This will fill a child up without meeting nutrient needs.

Find a balance

Pack fruits and vegetables, whole grains and a protein source while packing one treat. Also the more colorful the foods, the better. Choose a variety of fruits and veggies to maximize the benefits. Be sure to include low-fat milk instead of a juice box, or a serving of cheese or yogurt and bottled water. You can freeze the bottled water and use it to keep foods cold that need to stay cold, like cheese, meats, etc.

Presentation is everything

Making healthy foods more appealing is the key to success. This doesn't just include cutting foods into fun shapes like I mentioned earlier. It can also include providing healthy dips like hummus or non-fat yogurt, or preparing foods differently. Kabobs with cheese, fruits or raw veggies can be an exciting change-up to humdrum lunches. Kids will be more likely to eat something if it looks pleasant and is eye-catching.

Here are some other healthful lunch box item ideas:

- Yogurt or cottage cheese

- Cheese sticks or chunks
- Fruit cups or applesauce
- Dried fruits
- Trail mixes
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Whole-wheat pitas stuffed with tuna or chicken salad

If you're looking for more ideas or information, venture to www.choosemyplate.gov to learn more about food groups and for sample menus and recipes. We also hope to see you at the July 30 Back to School farmers market event.

Happy packing!

Haley Fulkerson is a registered and licensed clinical dietitian with Morrison Healthcare food and nutrition services at Owensboro Health Regional Hospital.