

Simple Lunch Ideas

The kids are home from school or childcare, and suddenly it is time for lunch. No need to panic. Take a deep breath, smile, and open your pantry. Preparing a lunch that is quick, healthy, and budget-friendly can be as easy as 1-2-3.

1. Choose a whole grain. Whole grains like brown rice, whole-grain bread, whole-wheat pasta, oats, and quinoa will provide kids more nutrition than refined grains like white bread or white rice. If you do not have whole grains on hand, do not fret. Add it to your grocery list for next time.

2. Choose a protein. Protein is in a variety of foods. Beans, lentils, nut butters, and eggs are kid-friendly and budget-friendly options. Other sources of protein include low-fat yogurt, milk, cottage cheese, fish, poultry, and meat.

3. Choose at least one fruit and one vegetable. Last, but not least, aim for half of kids' plates to include colorful fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables have the nutrients that support healthy growth and learning. Incorporating a variety of colors, especially dark green, red, and orange, will ensure kids get the nutrients they need.

If you feel unsure or need inspiration for how to pull together a lunch from your pantry, check out these quick and easy ideas for creating a healthy lunch. Finally, when it comes to drinks, stick with water or low-fat milk.

Breakfast for lunch. Breakfast foods are great for any meal of the day. You can get inspiration for healthy, sweet creations with oatmeal, or savory omelet or taco options with eggs.

Whole grain	Protein	Fruit and vegetable
Oatmeal made with milk and cinnamon	Stir in 1-2 teaspoons of nut butter or sprinkle nuts or seeds on top. Try walnuts, peanuts, almonds, sunflower, or chia seeds.	Mix canned pumpkin, shredded carrots, or shredded zucchini in with the oatmeal. Then top with raisins, berries, sliced apples, or banana.
Whole-grain toast or corn tortilla	Scrambled eggs with the option to sprinkle shredded cheese on top	Sauté veggies like spinach, bell peppers, broccoli, or tomatoes with eggs, and then serve with a side of fruit like grapes or unsweetened applesauce.

Sandwich staples. When kids are involved in the food planning and preparation process, they are more likely to eat it. Sandwiches and quesadillas are a great way for kids to participate and create.

Whole grain	Protein	Fruit and vegetable
Whole-grain crackers or pita	Tuna salad	Stack veggies like carrot sticks, celery, cucumbers, or grape tomatoes on top or serve with hummus or other dip. Serve any frozen fruit as a sweet side.
Whole-grain bread	Nut butter like peanut butter, sunflower butter, or almond butter	Try fruit like bananas, raisins, or berries on the sandwich. Have some apple slices on the side.
Whole-wheat or corn tortilla	Shredded cheese and canned black, pinto, or refried beans	Top with salsa, avocado, bell peppers, or tomatoes and a side of fruit like oranges or grapefruit.

Bowls of fun. Consider repurposing leftover grains, vegetables, or protein from previous meals to make pasta salads, stir-fry, or burrito bowls.

Whole grain	Protein	Fruit and vegetable
Whole-grain pasta dressed with a basic vinaigrette (oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper)	Canned beans, chickpeas, or crumbles of cheese	Add mixed vegetables (fresh or frozen) to the pasta. Serve with canned, fresh, or frozen pineapple.
Brown rice or quinoa	Leftover chicken or meat	Stir-fry or steam vegetables you have in the freezer or refrigerator. Season with some salt and pepper or with a small amount of soy sauce. For fruit, drain and serve mixed fruit that is canned in 100% fruit juice or water.

Source:

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