

# Back to School Lunch Tips

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It is likely that you have prepared hundreds of lunches over the years. If you just can't bear to pack another PB&J, use these tips to plan for a year of fun and nutritious school lunches that your child WON'T want to trade!

## Plan Ahead

It's tempting too revert to packaged junk food or boring lunches when your short on time. Planning ahead will help you feel better about what your children are eating.

## Involve the Kids

Children are more likely to eat what they've prepared. Discuss a lunch menu, new try new recipes and fun ideas. Add these items to the grocery list.

## Taste Test

Trying new foods is important, but a school lunch is not the time to pack foods which have yet to pass your child's taste test. Try new things at home first and keep of list of favorites.

## Get Organized

Once the menu items are purchased spend some time on early preparation; grate cheese, wash fruits and vegetables, prepare snack mixes, and dips, cut grapes into clusters, place juice boxes in the freezer etc. this will take about an hour of your weekend, but will save so much time during the week!

## Storage Issues

Who has time in the morning to rush around looking for plastic containers? Not to mention a matching lid (always an issue in our house). Before the school year begins, treat yourself to a new set of plastic lunch containers. Store them where the kids can reach, with zip-top bags, lunch bags, thermoses, wood craft sticks for spreading, plastic spoons, forks,

napkins and straws. Every so often check to see if it's time to re-stock or even better, ask the kids.

## EWV, Gross mom!

Keep hot foods hot, cold foods cold and sandwiches from getting soggy. Purchase and use thermoses for their intended purpose. Freeze juice pouches and boxes, they'll help keep things cold. I place frozen juice boxes in a plastic bag to avoid condensation moisture. Pack lettuce and tomato separately to be added to sandwiches when they're ready to eat. Save or purchase ketchup, mayonnaise and mustard pouches to add to sandwiches at school (too hard for little ones).

## No More Brown Apples

Keep a small water spray bottle filled with lemon juice and water in the 'fridge. Spray the cut apples before packing.

## Make It Fun When

When you include the items below in your back to school shopping, you'll be prepared to make a fun lunch every day!

- Large set of kid's cookie cutters; animal shapes, holidays, letters etc.
- Stickers, stickers and more stickers. Pick up the packages that are on sale for use throughout the year.
- Check out your party supply store for discontinued packs of napkins on sale. Select favorite characters, themes and holidays.

## School Lunch Recipes – Fun School Lunch Ideas

Fill your child's lunchbox with healthy and fun lunches they'll actually eat!

Kids need a healthy lunch, without a lot of extra packaging, preservatives and sugar. Here are some favorite school lunch recipes and [tips to help you prepare healthy lunches](#) all school year!

## A Few Easy Fool-Proof Lunch Recipes

### Cookie Cutter Sandwiches

Any sandwich cut with a large cookie cutter; star, heart, dinosaur, animals, etc. will become an irresistible treat!

### Pin Wheel Sandwiches

Spread your child's favorite sandwich filling onto a tortilla Roll it up and slice it into smaller pieces. Our favorite fillings are - peanut butter and jelly, lunch meat with cream cheese or Laughing Cow Cheese.

### Cheesy Stars

Use a small star cookie cutter to cut cheddar cheese pieces. In a separate bag provide crackers or apple slices. You can also use the cookie cutter to cut bologna, ham or turkey.

### Bugs on Log

An old favorite with kids - Fill celery with cream cheese or peanut butter and top with raisins. An equally delicious alternative to peanut butter is cream cheese or Laughing Cow Cheese.

### Smiley Face Fun

Spread peanut butter or cream cheese on a rice cake. Make a face using raisins or any dried fruit and a full head of hair with coconut flakes. This is a bit hard to pack for a lunch but a zip close plastic bag usually works pretty well.

### Cookie Dippers

Send vanilla wafer cookies along with a favorite yogurt. Kids love to dip and this way they are getting less sugar than most packaged treats.

### Fun Chips

Use large cookie cutters to cut a flour tortilla or wrap. Arrange on cookie sheet and toast in a 400 degree oven for 6-8 mins. Send to school plain or with bean dip for dipping. Try brushing a very small amount of olive oil or cooking spray. Then sprinkle parmesan cheese or cinnamon sugar. If you try the cinnamon sugar, send the chips along with a container of applesauce for dipping.

### Kids love to dip

Pack string cheese and rolled meat slices with a honey mustard dressing for dipping.

### I made it myself!

I find that my children are more apt to eat a brown bag lunch they've helped to make. Whether it's the cookies they baked with me or the sandwich they made in the morning.

### Packaging

The retail world knows...enticing packaging sells. Especially when it comes to kids. Unfortunately, what's inside is not always nutritious. Solve this dilemma by generating your own fun packaging. Before the school year begins, stock up on cheerfully colored re-usable containers, fun party napkins and stickers for plastic bags. A healthy lunch will be fun to eat!

## After School Snacks - Recipes and Tips for Healthy Kids Snacks

from [Amazingmoms.com](http://Amazingmoms.com)

Once children are in school for a full day it can be 6 hours or longer between lunch and dinner. This is far too long for active children. After school snacks are part of a healthy diet.

A nutritious snack will give your kids the "pick-me-up" they need to concentrate on homework, after school sports and household chores.

The operative word here is *nutritious*. Here are a few favorite after school snack ideas, from my home to yours.

### Dippers

It's amazing how quickly children will gobble up vegetables, as long as they are served with dip. Keep a bowl of carrots, celery, cucumbers and cherry tomatoes available for grabbing after school. Most of these dips will also taste delicious with Pita Bread or tortilla triangles, French bread, or large pretzel sticks.

Ranch Dip is a favorite, but you can experiment with others. Mix a 16oz. container of lite sour cream with dry soup mixes like tomato, vegetable or onion. Allow the dip to blend over night or mix it up in the morning.

### Cream Cheese Dip

1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese with chives  
1 (5 ounce) container sharp processed cheese food.

My children really love hummus for dipping vegetables and/or Pita bread. I'm not always able to make it myself. So to keep up with the demand, I purchase 16 oz. tubs from the grocery store.

Keep a jar of marinara sauce (Prego is our favorite), in the fridge. After school, warm up a small bowl of sauce and serve it with bread sticks for dipping.

### Fruit Dips

Any of these dips taste delicious with apples, pears, bananas, peaches or berries.

#### Fruit Dip #1

2 (8 ounce) packages cream cheese, softened  
1/2 cup brown sugar  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

#### Fruit dip #2

Combine cream cheese and crushed pineapple to the desired taste and consistency. This also tastes delicious when made made with canned mandarin oranges instead of pineapple. Drain as much of the fruit juice as possible to avoid a runny dip.

#### Fruit Dip # 3

Mix cream cheese, apple sauce a dash of cinnamon and brown sugar. Keep in the refrigerator in an airtight container.

### Baked Cheese Bites

2 cups sifted all-purpose flour  
1 pinch salt  
6 ounces shredded Cheddar cheese  
1/2 cup butter, melted

### DIRECTIONS:

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F (165 degrees C). Lightly grease a large cookie sheet. In a medium bowl, mix together the flour and salt. Stir in the cheddar cheese and melted butter to form a firm dough. Roll pieces of dough into ropes as big around as a penny. Slice into 1/4 inch pieces. You may need to chill the dough until firm for better rolling. Place the slices onto the prepared cookie sheet, 1 inch apart. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until the bottoms of the coins are lightly toasted and the tops are firm. Allow to cool completely before serving. Store in an airtight container at room temperature.



### English Muffin "Pizzas"

Children enjoy making this one themselves! Spread Spaghetti sauce on English muffin halves. Top with sliced olives, deli slices, vegetables and grated mozzarella cheese. Heat in a toaster oven, or microwave until the cheese is melted.

### The Snack Zone

Just like adults.... when children arrive home famished, they will grab whatever is easiest. Often, it's not the healthiest food options they gravitate to first. Keep a few of the above recipes prepared and ready to go. Assign a shelf or drawer in the refrigerator as the "snack shelf" and jar or cupboard space for non perishables. This is where the kids can grab a quick snack and don't have to ask first. Then, stock cut fruit, vegetables, dips, cheese slices etc. A variety of healthy snack options will keep your little ones from getting bored and everyone will be happy.