

# GET UP & GROW

HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD



## Lunchbox ideas:

Meals for early  
childhood settings



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing



You will need to provide lunch and snacks for your child while they are at family day care, child care or preschool if the setting does not offer meals. Children have small stomachs, so their energy and nutritional requirements are best met with small meals and snacks spread throughout the day.

Cow's milk should not be given as a main drink to infants before 12 months of age. It can be used in small amounts in other foods from around six months. Full-cream plain milk is recommended for children aged one to two years, and reduced-fat plain milk is suitable for children over the age of two years.

Depending on how long your child attends the setting, you might need to provide just one snack, or lunch and one or two snacks. Regular meals and snacks help your child to concentrate, play and enjoy their day.

## Lunch ideas

- A sandwich, small pita wrap or small bread roll with fillings such as:
  - mashed egg with lettuce
  - shredded chicken with cheese and lettuce
  - tuna, corn and lettuce
  - turkey breast with cucumber and lettuce
  - chicken, chutney and alfalfa sprouts
  - cold roast meat, chutney, lettuce and tomato
  - vegemite and cheese
  - cream cheese and grated carrot
  - avocado, tomato and lettuce
  - mashed banana
- A few crackers or rice cakes with cheese
- A small, cold slice of frittata
- A homemade savoury muffin – zucchini or corn and cheese
- One or two slices of homemade pita pizza

### What not to include

Try not to include sweet fillings in sandwiches, for example: jam, honey, sprinkles or chocolate spread.

**Keep lunches cool by sending them in an insulated lunchbox, with a frozen drink bottle or ice brick inside.**

# Snack ideas

- Small, fresh pieces of fruit: a mandarin, banana, apricot, pear, plum or a bunch of grapes
- Sliced fruit: apples, oranges, melon or pineapple
- Two or three crackers with cheese or vegemite
- One or two small pikelets – try including grated fruit or vegetables in the mix
- A flavoured scone – pumpkin or cheese
- A few vegetable slices or sticks served with dip (be sure to blanch tough or fibrous vegetables until soft)
- A small tub of yoghurt
- A cheese stick

## What not to include

Packaged snack foods such as muesli bars, fruit straps, chocolate bars, lollies, donuts and potato chips. These are 'discretionary choices', foods that are high in kilojoules, added sugars, salt and/or saturated fat and have little nutritional value.

If you want to put a 'treat' in your child's lunchbox, choose something other than food. A small note or drawing from you or a bright sticker can be a lovely surprise occasionally. It is not necessary to pack 'discretionary choices' in the lunchbox.

# Drinks

The best drink for your child is water. Include a water bottle in your child's lunchbox every day.

## What not to include

Sweet drinks such as soft drink, flavoured mineral water, flavoured milk, cordial and fruit drink are 'discretionary choices'. They do not provide much nutrition and can fill children up, leading to a decreased appetite for healthier foods. Sweet drinks can also lead to tooth decay and weight gain, and are not part of a healthy lunchbox.

Include a variety of foods in your child's lunchbox from day to day. Make sure that the foods packed in the lunchbox are from the basic food groups.

- Vegetables, including different types and colours, and legumes/beans
- Fruit
- Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties such as breads, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles, polenta, couscous, oats, quinoa and barley
- Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, and legumes/beans
- Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced-fat (reduced-fat milks are not suitable for children under the age of two years).

If you are packing any foods that need refrigeration (such as cheese, yoghurt, milk or cooked eggs or meat), use an insulated lunch bag with a frozen water bottle inside. This will keep the lunch cool and prevent it from spoiling.



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For more meal and snack ideas  
Dietitians Association of Australia  
[www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

[www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

All information in this publication is correct as at April 2013