



# HOW TO MAKE THE PERFECT LUNCHBOX FOR PRE-SCHOOLERS



If it's possible to take advantage of a hot meal provided by your early years provider - go for it. It's likely to be healthy and well balanced, especially if they are part of the Early Years Alliance's Nutrition Support Programme.

However, if you choose to provide a packed lunch, it's worth following these tips to ensure you include the key nutrients needed to support your child's growth and learning.

## What to include:

### FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

**How much?** At least one fruit and one vegetable in each lunchbox.

**Examples:** Fresh fruit, tinned fruits (in juice not syrup), dried fruits, salad items and vegetables. You could include vegetable crudites for dipping or add veggies to salads, pasta or rice dishes.



**Why?** Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins, minerals, fibre and anti-oxidants.

**Tips:** Aim for a variety of colours. Not only will it make the lunchbox look more appetising but it also provides a variety of different vitamins and minerals.

## POTATOES, BREAD, RICE, PASTA AND OTHER STARCHY FOODS



**How much?** Include at least one portion

**Examples:** Sandwiches, pitta bread, wraps, pasta salad, potato salad, sweet potato wedges, rice dishes, couscous, bread sticks, crackers, oat cakes, rice cakes.

**Why?** These foods will provide energy, fuel for vital tissues and organs including the brain, fibre, B vitamins and other minerals.

**Tips:** Try to include some wholegrain varieties from this food group each week such as brown, wholemeal, granary or 50/50 bread, wholewheat pasta or brown rice.



## DAIRY AND ALTERNATIVES



**How much?** Include at least one portion.

**Examples:** Carton of milk, cheese, yoghurts, custard, rice pudding, milk or yoghurt-based smoothies, soya, oat and nut-based milks.

**Why?** These foods provide calcium, B vitamins and protein.

**Tips:** If your child is over two years old and growing well, opt for semi-skimmed milk and low-fat yoghurts and cheeses.

## BEANS, PULSES, FISH, EGGS, MEAT AND OTHER PROTEINS



**How much?** Include at least one portion in every lunchbox.

**Examples:** Chicken, turkey, pork, beef, lamb, beans, fish, shellfish, lentils, chickpeas, pulses, soya products such as tofu, quorn, nuts, hummus.

**Why?** These foods provide protein, iron and zinc.

**Tips:** Try to include at least one portion of fish each week. Oily fish such as fresh, tinned or frozen salmon, sardines, pilchards, mackerel, herring, and fresh tuna may be beneficial for children's cognitive development. Try a salmon or mackerel pate as a dip or sandwich filler.

## DRINKS

**How much?** Include a healthy drink daily.



**Examples:** Milk and water are the only tooth-friendly drinks for children and are the best options for your child's lunchbox.

**Tips:** There's no need to spend money on exotic or colourful looking drinks. Tap water is free and one of the healthiest drinks you can offer your child. Fill a reusable bottle with fresh tap water or ask your childcare provider if they are happy to provide water for your child.

### **What not to include:**

**FOODS HIGH IN FAT, SUGAR OR SALT:** avoid including these foods in your child's lunchbox.

**Examples:** Crisps, biscuits, cereal bars, chocolate, sweets and other confectionary, fried foods, takeaway or fast food meals, pastries, fizzy drinks or juice style drinks.

**Why?** These foods are often known as empty calories because they provide energy but very few useful nutrients. These foods often contain lots of sugar, salt or saturated fat. Too much sugar can damage children's teeth and too much saturated fat can lead to excess weight gain and poor health.

Your early years provider might have a food and nutrition policy forbidding these foods and drinks. Ask them for details of their food and nutrition policy if you haven't seen it.

When asked, children will often prefer the same favourite lunchbox fillers over and over again. They know what they like and would probably be happy to eat their favourite meal everyday if we let them!

But just like early years settings wouldn't serve the same thing day after day, it's important that we do the same with lunchboxes. This will encourage your child to enjoy a variety of foods and benefit from a range of nutrients. Take a look at this example weekly menu for some lunchbox ideas.

### **Monday:**

- Tuna and sweetcorn pitta pockets
- Cucumber sticks with hummus dip
- Cheese triangle
- Blueberries
- Bottle of water

### **Tuesday:**

- Ham and cheese tortilla wrap
- Breadsticks
- Cherry tomatoes (halved)
- Natural yoghurt
- Packet of raisins
- Carton of milk

### **Wednesday:**

- Sausage, onion and tomato pasta salad
- Custard pot
- Satsuma
- Scotch pancake
- Bottle of water

### **Thursday:**

- Cheese and salad sandwich
- Hard-boiled egg
- Apple slices (squeeze lemon juice on each slice to stop them turning brown)
- Carton of milk

### **Friday:**

- Egg mayonnaise wholemeal roll
- Red and yellow pepper strips
- Rice pudding
- Tinned fruit salad (in juice not syrup)
- Bottle of water

## **PRACTICAL TIPS:**

- At the start of the week, jot down what you intend to include each day and take this list shopping with you. Pre-planning is a good way to ensure you've covered all the key food groups and can help to avoid impulse buying at the supermarket, saving you money.
- Ask your early years provider what storage facilities they have for lunchboxes. If they can't be stored in a fridge, make sure you include an ice pack in your child's lunchbox to keep it cool.

