

LUNCHBOX LESSONS

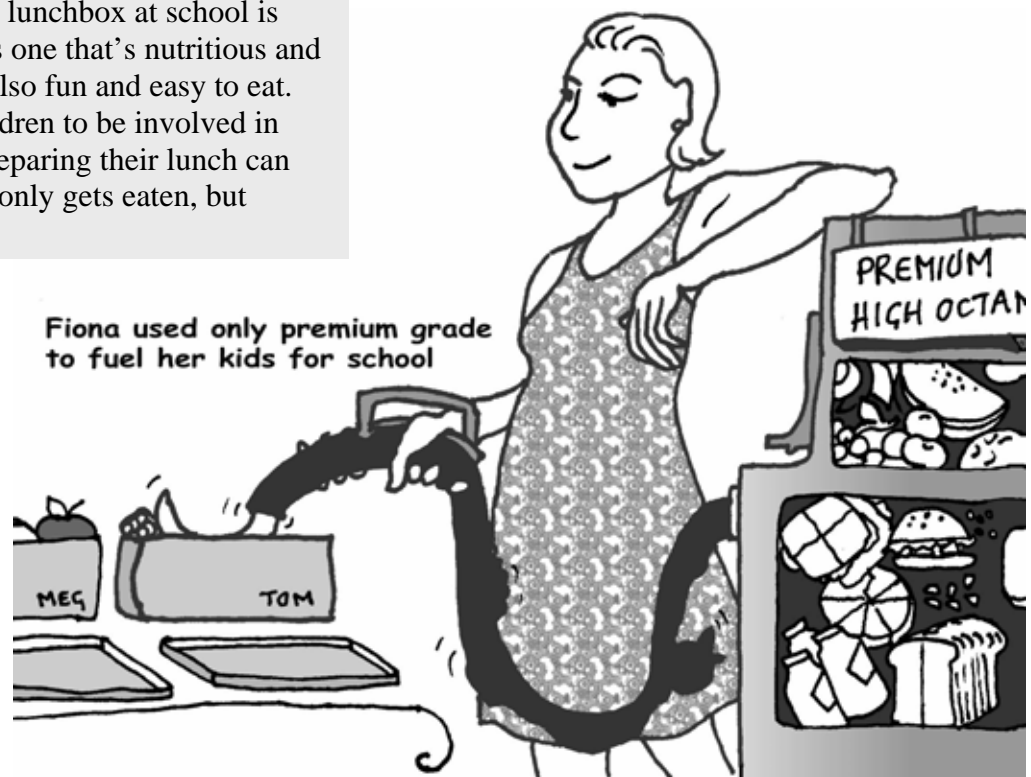
- It's important for children to eat healthily, and variety and balance are key. Build a tasty, nutritious school lunch by including starchy food, protein food, some dairy food, fruit and veg and a drink.

Lunchbox Safety

Food-poisoning bugs can grow quickly in foods like cooked meats, fish, chicken and salads, particularly in warm weather. And because lunchboxes may sit around for several hours before the food is eaten, there's plenty of opportunity for this to happen. Follow these suggestions to help keep food safe.

- **Hygiene.** Make sure your hands, chopping board and utensils are clean and dry before preparing food.
- **Keep the food cold.** Use an insulated lunchbox and/or put a freezer pack in with the food to keep it cool. Alternatively, include a frozen drink bottle in the lunchbox — it should defrost by lunchtime. Make sure the lunchbox is refrigerated when it gets to school, if facilities are available.
- **Preparation.** Save time and keep food cool by freezing sandwiches the night before (or even prepare and freeze sandwiches for a week in advance). Foods suitable for freezing include bread, cooked meat, cheese, peanut butter, baked beans, mashed eggs and VEGEMITE. Yoghurt and fruit like grapes and banana segments can be frozen too.

Eating healthy food helps children concentrate and learn, so a healthy lunchbox at school is vital. The best lunch is one that's nutritious and quick to prepare, but also fun and easy to eat. Encouraging your children to be involved in choosing foods and preparing their lunch can help ensure that it not only gets eaten, but enjoyed as well.



You can build a healthy lunch with the following:

Starchy food

- A **carbohydrate**-based food is a good starting point for a lunch to **fill hungry tummies**. This can be bread, pasta, rice, potatoes (not chips!) or couscous, for example.
- Given that **sandwiches** are often the lunchbox staple, keep kids interested by using a **variety of breads**, including wholemeal, white, rye, rolls, pita, bagels, focaccia and rice cakes.

Protein food

- Lean meat, tinned tuna, egg, tofu and baked beans are good high-protein foods for **filling** sandwiches, or for adding to food like pasta or rice salad. Importantly, most provide **iron** as well.
- Nuts and peanut butter are also good protein sources, but check that your school doesn't have a '**nut-free**' **safety policy** before packing them.
- Protein-rich **dairy** foods like yoghurt and cheese are also good sources of **calcium**, which is vital for growing bodies, especially for strong bones.

Fruit and veg

- For plenty of **vitamins**, **minerals** and dietary **fibre**, try to include at least a serve each of fruit and veg in every lunchbox.
- Kids might find vegetables more **interesting** served as sticks with dip, mixed together with pasta, or as topping for a mini pizza.
- Pack fruit and veg that are **manageable** and **easy to eat**: fruit salad, mandarins or pre-peeled oranges, seedless grapes, cherry tomatoes or snow peas, for example.
- If you don't mind paying a bit extra, look out for THE WIGGLES Applesnax and KIDEDIBLE packaged fruit in the fresh fruit and veg section of your supermarket, which have been specially selected for their **child-friendly** size.

Drinks

- Don't forget a drink. Active bodies need plenty of fluid to keep them well **hydrated**, and **water** is the best choice, although **milk** — both cow's and soy with added calcium — is good too.
- Drinks can linger in kids' mouths, so sugary ones may increase the risk of **tooth decay**; 100% fruit juice can be diluted. Drinks with **added sugar** that don't provide the same nutritional goodies as fruit juice — sweetened juice drinks, cordial and fizzy drinks, for example — are best left out altogether.

Source: www.choice.com.au

See *Choice* website for more practical information about healthy lunches.
March *Parenting Tips* looks at the four nutritional components of healthy snacks.