



Healthy Packed Lunches



A simple guide for parents

A healthy packed lunch doesn't need to be complicated or expensive. Aim for **variety, balance and foods your child enjoys**. The NHS recommends looking at the overall balance of a child's diet across the day or week rather than trying to make every individual meal perfect.



A Lunchbox Formula

Try to include something from each of these groups:



1. Starchy food

Choose a source of carbohydrates to provide energy – bread, pitta, wraps, pasta salad, couscous or crackers.

Where your child will eat them, choosing wholegrain or higher-fibre options can be helpful.



2. Fruit & vegetables

Try to include **at least one or two portions** in the lunchbox – apple, pear, berries, satsuma, carrots, peppers, and tomatoes.

Cut foods into child-friendly pieces where appropriate. The NHS suggests bite-sized fruit such as chopped apple, strawberries, blueberries, and halved grapes.



3. Protein

Protein foods help provide important nutrients for growth and development – chicken, tuna, cheese, Quorn.

4. Dairy or alternative

Include a dairy food or suitable fortified alternative – low sugar yoghurt, cheese, plain yoghurt with fruit or a Fortified dairy alternative.

The NHS suggests choosing lower-fat and lower-sugar yoghurt options where suitable.

5. A drink

Water is a great everyday choice.

A reusable water bottle makes it easy for children to drink throughout the day. The NHS recommends limiting fruit juice and smoothies to a combined maximum of **150ml per day**.

10 Easy Lunchbox Ideas

1. **Chicken & salad wrap** + cucumber + strawberries + yoghurt
2. **Cheese sandwich** + carrot sticks + apple + yoghurt
3. **Tuna pasta salad** + sweetcorn + grapes + cheese
4. **Egg & lettuce sandwich** + cucumber + berries
5. **Vegetable wrap** + pepper sticks + banana
6. **Chicken pasta** + tomatoes + satsuma + yoghurt
7. **Cheese & crackers** + cucumber + pear + fruit
8. **Tuna & sweetcorn sandwich** + carrot sticks + blueberries
9. **Pitta with cream cheese** + vegetable sticks + apple + yoghurt
10. **Mini bagel with chicken and salad** + fruit + yoghurt

Healthier swaps

Instead of...	Try...
Chocolate bar	Fresh fruit
Sweets	Berries or chopped fruit

Crisps every day	Oatcakes or crackers
Sugary yoghurt	Lower-sugar/plain yoghurt + fruit
Cake	Fruit bread or a small homemade option
Sugary drink	Water or milk
Fruit bar	Fresh fruit

This doesn't mean children can never have treats — foods high in fat, salt and sugar are best kept **less often and in smaller amounts**.

Let children get involved!

Children are more likely to engage with their lunch when they have some choice.

Try asking:

"Would you like an apple or strawberries?"

"Chicken or cheese sandwich?"

"Carrot or cucumber sticks?"

You could even let them help prepare their lunchbox the night before.

Make it colourful!

A lunchbox doesn't have to look perfect. Try offering **different colours, textures and shapes**.

-  Red — strawberries / tomatoes
-  Orange — carrots / satsumas
-  Green — cucumber / grapes
-  Blue/purple — blueberries
-  Yellow — banana / sweetcorn



Don't forget food safety

Follow Edu-Plays rules, particularly around **nuts, hummus and allergies**. Keep foods that need refrigeration appropriately chilled and use an insulated lunch bag and cool pack where needed.



Helpful websites for parents

NHS – Healthier Lunchboxes

Quick lunchbox recipes, food swaps and practical ideas.

[NHS Healthier Lunchboxes](#)

NHS – The Eatwell Guide

A simple guide to the main food groups and achieving a balanced diet.

[NHS Eatwell Guide](#)

NHS – Healthy Recipes

Lots of family-friendly recipe ideas, including lunches.

[NHS Healthy Recipes](#)

British Nutrition Foundation – Children's Nutrition

Evidence-based information about children's nutrition, portions and healthy eating.

[British Nutrition Foundation – Children](#)

GOV.UK – School Food Standards

Useful information about food standards and healthy food provision in schools in England.

[GOV.UK School Food Standards](#)