



HEALTHY SCHOOL LUNCHES

I'm sure you've heard what's been all over the news about school lunches – both the fact the cafeteria lunches aren't necessarily the healthiest, as well as what students are eating out of the vending machines. According to the USDA (in a survey of about 10,000 children), twice as many children eat snack foods (such as potato chips, candy and corn chips) today as did twenty years ago. Over the same time period, soda consumption has jumped by 37% for children between the ages of six and nine. Although these kids are eating more calories, they are frequently “empty” calories, so there are many children who still fall short on meeting the recommended daily intake of vitamins and minerals.

If you aren't sure your child is getting a well-balanced lunch at school, pack your own nutritional meal. Getting your kids involved can help create a fun and healthy lunch that will actually be eaten! Ask for their input and even have them help make some of it. Refer to the food pyramid and try to include something from each of the basic food groups. Be sure to keep the lunches you've packed safe: keep everything clean when packing the lunch, keep cold foods in an insulated lunch box or case, and store hot foods (like soup or chili) in an insulated thermos. Keep in mind that pre-packaged lunches may look fun and healthy and may be convenient, but they are often high in fat, sugar and calories, and frequently are more expensive than what you can prepare at home.

To get your children involved in their lunch prep, have them help make some homemade granola or trail mix. Muffins you make yourself mean that you can control the fat and sugar that go into them – have the kids mix up the batter and add in dried fruit or raisins or nuts. Here's a fun lunchbox treat your kids can help make: spread a whole-wheat tortilla with low-fat cream cheese and top with julienned or shredded veggies (you cut the veggies) and some lettuce, then roll it up – how easy is that? Even easier – spread peanut butter and jelly on a whole-wheat tortilla for a PB&J wrap.

Healthy snack ideas: raw veggies with low-fat cream cheese or sour cream dips; bread sticks or pita chips with hummus; baggies of Cheerios or granola; graham crackers; applesauce; dried or fresh fruits; low-fat yogurt; pretzels (depending on the variety can be fat-free); air-popped popcorn.

Here's to some fun and healthy back-to-school lunches for our little savers!

