

## News to Share with Parents

### What You Put in a Lunchbox May Determine Appetite for Learning

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What you pack in your child's lunchbox can determine his or her appetite for learning. Studies show kids who eat healthy lunches, with limited sugar, tend to learn better throughout the afternoon, says Susan Aaronson, a registered dietitian with MFit, the health promotion division of the University of Michigan Health System.

"One-third of children's calories throughout the day are consumed at lunch, and we want to make sure those calories are nutritious and healthy," says Aaronson, who also teaches students how to lead a heart-healthy lifestyle as coordinator of Project Healthy Schools. "It's also important because studies have shown that children who eat a healthy lunch do learn better in the afternoon," she says.

The basic rule of thumb when packing a school lunch is to get in as many items from the various food groups as possible, Aaronson says. Lunches should include at least one fruit or vegetable. Kids are more likely to eat smaller portions of fruits, so a Clementine orange or a small, sliced apple is ideal. These foods should be kept cool and in airtight bags. If your child still isn't

interested, using pre-packaged fruits is acceptable – with some exceptions. "Look for unsweetened applesauce, and choose fruit cups packed in their own natural juice or light syrup, instead of heavy syrup," she says.

Believe it or not, there are ways to make eating veggies fun. "Kids love to dip," Aaronson says. "You could take celery that's cut into small pieces and send a little bit of peanut butter for the child to dip into, or you could send carrots and a little bit of low-fat ranch dip." Other healthy dip options include hummus and tahini.

If a sandwich is the main course, choose fat-free or low-fat meats and whole wheat or whole grain bread. Pre-made meals such as "Lunchables" should be avoided, because of high fat content, but parents can make their own versions of the popular product.

"You might want to pack your version of a 'Lunchable' by including freshly sliced, low-fat lunch meat with a low-fat, high-fiber cracker of your child's choice," she says.

Children need about three servings of dairy every day. Low fat cheeses, milk and yogurt are good dairy options, Aaronson says. Any yogurt that has less than 2 percent milk fat and doesn't have a lot of added sugar is acceptable, she says.

For more information, visit these Web sites:

- School lunches  
[www.med.umich.edu/llibr/pa/pa\\_lunches\\_hhg.htm](http://www.med.umich.edu/llibr/pa/pa_lunches_hhg.htm)
- Nutrition: School Health Guidelines •  
[www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/nutrition/guidelines/help.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/nutrition/guidelines/help.htm)
- University of Michigan Integrative Medicine's Healing Foods Pyramid •  
[www.med.umich.edu/umim/clinical/pyramid/index.htm](http://www.med.umich.edu/umim/clinical/pyramid/index.htm)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture MyPyramid Food Guidance System •  
[www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)

When it comes to beverages, Aaronson recommends only three choices: Water, milk or 100 percent juice.

"You need to read the labels on juice products to distinguish between a juice drink that has 100 percent vitamin C in it, versus one that's 100 percent juice. Aaronson also points out that most fruit servings should come in a solid form for the benefits of the fiber.

It's perfectly acceptable to send a snack with your child's lunch, Aaronson says. Instead of high-fat chips or cookies, Aaronson suggests baked chips, pretzels, cracker products or the new, 100-calorie packs by Nabisco.

"I think we can put a tiny bit of candy into a child's lunch," Aaronson says. "It doesn't have to necessarily be on a daily basis, but there are a lot of options where you can send a Hershey kiss instead of an entire candy bar, or a trail mix that includes some M&Ms."