

Starting Reception: Lunch Box Parent Guidance

Sending your child to school with a packed lunch is a great way to ensure they're eating a balanced and nutritious diet that will keep their energy levels up and ready for learning. You can plan your child's lunch (or encourage them to help plan their own) using some of the guidance below.

A balanced diet, built upon the four key food groups – fruit and vegetables, starchy carbohydrates, dairy/alternatives and proteins – is crucial for children's growth and development.

Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are fantastic sources of vitamins and minerals that keep your child's body healthy. They're also a good source of fibre, too.

Try to provide two sources of these foods in your child's lunch, including items such as:

- fresh, frozen or dried fruit such as apples, strawberries or oranges
- tinned fruits like pineapple or peach slices in juice (taken out of the tin)
- cut vegetables like cucumber, bell peppers and carrot



Starchy Carbohydrates

Foods that contain carbohydrates are great for giving long-lasting energy, so your child has plenty of energy throughout the day. Aim to include a source of starchy carbohydrates in your child's lunch each day. You could include:

- bread
- pitta
- wraps
- potatoes, sweet potatoes and other starchy root vegetables
- crackers
- rice and other grains
- pasta or noodles
- breakfast cereals

Dairy or Dairy Alternatives

Foods containing calcium (like dairy products) can help to boost your child's bone growth, while protein-rich foods can help with muscle strength. You should aim for one portion of these foods, which could include:

- milk
- cheese
- low-sugar yoghurt
- fromage frais
- oat or soya milk



Proteins

Protein is vital for your child due to its role in rapid growth and development. It helps build muscles and tissues, supports a strong immune system and aids in brain development. Add protein to your child's lunch by including your protein choice in a sandwich, wrap or salad. You could include:

- beans and pulses
- meat and poultry
- fish
- eggs
- meat alternatives
- tofu
- hummus
- falafel

Many schools are 'nut-free' so it's a good idea to avoid adding nuts to your child's lunch, just to be safe.



Eat in Moderation

Everyone likes a sweet treat or snack and a balanced diet means having something from every food group. A small treat once in a while does not mean you have an unhealthy diet.

Here are some tips about these foods:

- Avoid cereals that are high in sugar, like those that are sugar-coated or chocolate-flavoured.
- Limit flavoured dried rice, pasta and noodle products, such as instant flavoured noodles, pasta and rice in packets and pots.
- Limit your child's consumption of items like chips, fried rice and fried noodles to no more than once a week.
- Avoid fruit tinned in syrup – opt for fruit tinned in juice instead.
- Limit foods high in saturated fat, salt, and/or sugars like cakes, sweet and savoury pastries, biscuits, crisps, chocolate and other confectionery.
- Limit foods containing artificial sweeteners as they may encourage children to prefer very sweet foods.

Talk to your child's school about any other recommendations they have or whether any other foods need to be avoided due to allergies of other pupils.

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation.