



## Super powers for super school lunches

With September upon us, making school lunches is back on the agenda. With a little planning and creativity, packing school lunches can be a lot less daunting and can even help your family save money. Lunches that include whole grain foods, vegetables and fruits, and protein foods provide the nutrients and energy needed for children to play and engage at school while also supporting healthy growth and development. Here are some ideas and tips to help make preparing lunches easier and more affordable.

### Unleash your meal planning

Taking the time to plan meals for the week can

take the guesswork out of what to make for meals, including lunches. Here are some tips for successful meal planning:

- Make meal planning a family activity. For example, use dinner time to brainstorm meal ideas or to build a grocery list together. Involving kids in the meal planning process teaches them life skills such as budgeting, organizing, reading recipes, and writing a grocery list.
- Plan for leftovers. Increasing dinner servings so that there are leftovers for lunch is a great way to simplify school lunch prep the next day.

# Healthy Children

September 2022 Family Newsletter

- Save your meal plan to use again. Once you have a few weeks of meal plans ready, you can use them in rotation or look back at them for ideas for future weeks.

## Jump ahead with meal preparation

- If you can, make time to bake from scratch. Having healthy snacks on hand, such as wholegrain muffins, bannock or granola makes it easy to put a lunch together. Freezing large batches of baking can provide grab-and-go snacks for a few months at time. For recipe ideas go to [Inspiring Healthy Eating](#).
- Wash and cut fresh vegetables and fruit ahead of time. Having ready-to-eat produce on hand helps bring lunches together quickly.
- Repurpose food. If you have vegetables that need to be used up, bring them together to create soup, chili, or stir-fry that you can freeze and use for lunches in the future.
- Involve kids in lunch prep. For example, get them to chop cucumbers, portion out low-fat yogurt, or spread hummus on pita. Not only does this help them develop food literacy skills, it increases the chances that they will eat what they pack.

Using your meal plan to build your grocery list helps ensure that you don't forget anything you need and are less likely to buy things impulsively.

## Become a grocery shopping champion

Once you have a meal plan and a grocery list, grocery shopping becomes a lot more efficient. Being prepared helps reduce the chance of buying food that doesn't get eaten.

Less food waste helps save money while also reducing the impact on the environment. Here are a few tips for grocery shopping:

- Shop the sales. Check out flyers, coupons and apps, then plan for lunches based on items that are priced well.
- Consider shopping for a mix of fresh, frozen and canned produce. Frozen or canned (packed in water or juice) vegetables and fruit are a great alternative, are equally nutritious, and often less expensive than fresh options.
- Try not to grocery shop when you're hungry. This can help you stick to your grocery list and avoid adding unneeded items to your cart.

## Pack lunches like a pro

With meal planning and preparation under your belt, putting it all together is a breeze! Here are some tips to consider when packing up school lunches:

- Use reusable containers, like water bottles, containers, and food wraps. Using these items in place of single use alternatives is an environmentally friendly option that also reduces costs in the long term. Make sure you choose containers that your kids can open on their own. It helps them access their food and also builds their independence and confidence.
- Use an insulated lunch bag and containers. Keeping foods at the right temperature (hot or cold) is important to keep food safe to eat. For tips on

# Healthy Children

September 2022 Family Newsletter

keeping hot food hot and cold food cold, check out [Keeping school lunches safe](#).

## The power of community

If you don't have enough food for school lunches, it's okay to reach out for help. There are often programs and services available to ensure kids have access to breakfast, lunch and snacks at school. Schools may also have options to assist with other school related costs. You can call Alberta 211 or reach out to your school principal or teacher for information on programs and supports at school or in your local area.

### For more tips, go to:

- [Create a healthy grocery list](#)
- [Meal planning template](#)
- [Tips for making lunch](#)
- [Tips to spend less money on food](#)