

5 tips for packing a well-balanced school lunch

(NC) One of every parent's worst back-to-school nightmares is their kids coming home with half-eaten or completely untouched lunch bags. It's frustrating for parents who take time each day to pack a nutritious meal for their child, but this is a battle that can be overcome.

"Kids can be picky about everything, from the way food is presented to them to the type of food they're presented with," explains Sébastien Bergeron of Dairy Farmers of Canada. "For concerned parents, peace of mind can come with letting kids choose foods that they're excited to try and that are good for their overall health and well-being."

Here are a few practical steps to help get even the pickiest of kids back on track and eating their school lunches this year.

1. Involve kids in lunchtime planning. Give them options to choose from so they feel in control. Offer a few choices for each part of their lunch, like chopped veggies and fruits with healthy dips; proteins like sliced meats, cheese

or hard-boiled eggs; and high-fibre carbohydrates for longer lasting energy.

2. Take it a step further and have kids help prepare their lunch. Even kindergarteners can start with easy tasks like washing fruits and veggies. Kids get a sense of pride from helping out with their lunch prep, and are more likely to eat it if they know what's in it.

3. Invest in good thermal containers and bottles to ensure kid's food and drinks remain hot or cold, or even separated from each other the way that they like. Don't forget to check that they can open the containers and bags easily.

4. Make a snack-inspired lunch. Many kids would prefer to graze throughout the day. Consider creative "finger foods" that are easy and fun to eat. Pack items like cheese and crackers, veggies and dip, fruit and a granola bar.

5. Make food experimentation fun for kids. Take them grocery shopping and let them pick one new item a week to try out. Try sampling different Canadian cheeses and pick one that kids like and have chosen for themselves.

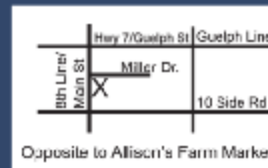


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Q: How do I get my kids to brush their teeth?

A: You know it's important for your child's health. As a parent, you want to do the right thing. When it comes to regular tooth brushing, though, it's become a struggle just to get your child to brush their teeth.

Some parents, unfortunately, give in and allow their children to neglect good oral hygiene. Don't make the mistake! Your children should be taught very early how to brush. This can be encouraged as a regular habit by using some of the flavored children's toothpastes now available. Try to reserve brushing for the same time each day so it comes to be an expected activity. If your child still resists, make a game of it. You may even wish to pretend to be a "dentist" for your child, in the process doing the needed brushing for them. Older children may respond to a reward system that you establish.

Perhaps most important, set a good example. Your daily brushing, flossing, and avoidance of sweets will do more to develop good dental habits than anything else.

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