

PACK-IT Cookbook



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Welcome to the **PACK-IT** Cookbook

where we will be **P**acking Complete Lunches for **K**ids Together. We're so glad you've chosen our cookbook to help you on your journey of nourishing your kids with wholesome and fun meals - on a budget. These lunches will be good for you, good for your child, and good for your wallet.

We parents show our love to our kids in many ways. One of those special ways is undoubtedly with food! These meals are intended

to bring you and your child closer together in the kitchen, and closer together at lunch time by incorporating meals that you can cook and/or prepare together. The food habits children form today become their lifelong food habits. By providing healthy yet fun meals at lunch, you are showing your child that you care about their health and want the best for them.

So, what makes a healthy and fun lunch? This cookbook adheres to the MyPlate  standards developed by the United States Department of Agriculture. Each recipe in this cookbook includes items from every food group for a balanced meal. Because your kids are sweet enough already - all drinks included are either low-fat milk or water. Low-calorie, non-sugary drink beverages are not only better for our kids, but less expensive too.

How to use this cookbook:

There are 20 total recipes, designed to provide you with one month of school lunches! They are divided into four weeks, with five recipes for each week - just enough to plan a packed lunch for every day.

At the beginning of each week is a shopping list. If you follow the shopping list, you will have all the supplies you need for the week. An average shopping list "cost" is included, so you'll be prepared when you go to the grocery store. The cost may vary depending on where you live and get your food or what ingredients you already have on hand.



Each recipe has many important and helpful sections described below:

- **Servings.** Some of the recipes are for one serving (just the lunch) and some are for the whole family with leftovers for lunch the next day.
- **Lunch Cost.** Extra tight budget this week? Scroll through the recipes and find the lowest priced lunches, or lunches that stretch your dollar the furthest.
- **Better-Bag-Bites.** These are helpful nutrition messages that offer alternative serving suggestions based on your child's preferences, provide tips on how you can involve your child in cooking these meals, or simply provide practical advice on preparing the recipe.
- **Pack-it-Safe.** Keep your kids safe by making sure food is stored properly. This section provides helpful tips for keeping lunch at a safe temperature.
- **Nutrition Facts Label.** Each lunch has nutrition facts included so you can know exactly what nutrients are being provided. This cookbook also adheres to the Virginia Cooperative Extension Family Nutrition Program's and the National School Lunch Program guidelines for recommended amounts of calories, fat, saturated fat, and sodium.
- **Ingredients and Instructions.** We want you to be prepared and feel confident about making each recipe. An ingredients list along with instructions are provided (if cooking is involved).

If your child doesn't like something, leave it out! Or feel free to substitute for something else he or she prefers.

Involve your child! Give your child small or big jobs depending on his or her age. Invite your child to help throughout the process, starting when making the grocery list, visiting the grocery store, and while cooking, packing a lunch bag, and cleaning. Spending time together is fun. Plus, kids are usually more interested in eating a food when they get to go to the store and pick it out or help you cook it.

Farmers markets are a great opportunity to find wonderful and fresh produce. Make substitutions based on what is in season. See the Additional Tips for PACK-IT for a list of foods which are typically in season during various times of the year. Check and see if your farmers market accepts benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Many do, and some even have programs to help those benefits stretch further using SNAP matching incentive programs.

On the days when my kids don't buy lunch at school, we pack easy, healthy lunches. These recipes have worked for me and they can work for you too!

Alisha Farris, PhD, RDN

Author of Virginia Cooperative Extension Child Nutrition publication series (link to <https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/author/f/farris-alisha.resource.html>) and multiple studies about the nutritional quality of packed lunches for students (link to <http://alisha010.wixsite.com/alishafarris/resume>). She has also appeared in over 100 new stories about her work comparing the nutrition of packed and school lunches (link to <http://alisha010.wixsite.com/alishafarris/media-releases>).

Weekly Shopping Planner



Fruits

Focus on whole fruit

- 1 apple
- 1 peach
- 1 plum
- 1 whole pineapple
- 1 orange



Protein Foods

Vary your protein routine

- 8 ounce block of reduced fat cheddar cheese
- 1 gallon low-fat (1%) milk



Vegetables

Vary your veggies

- 1 pound baby carrots
- 6 white potatoes
- 2 onions
- 1 bunch celery
- Jar of minced garlic
- 15 ounces canned no salt added diced tomatoes
- 2-15 ounce cans no salt added green beans (or 2 cups fresh, snapped)
- 2-15 ounce cans no salt added green peas



Dairy

Move to low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt

- 1 package whole-wheat English muffins
- 1 loaf of whole-wheat bread
- 1 package whole-wheat crackers
- 12 ounces whole-wheat pasta noodles (your favorite shape!)
- 1 small package brown rice



Grains

Make half your grains whole grains

- 3 pound whole chicken (or 2-12 ounce cans of white-meat chicken)
- 8-12 chicken drumsticks (about 2 pounds)
- 15 ounce can black beans (or 1 cup dry beans)
- 16 ounce jar peanut butter (or allergy friendly alternative)



Other Items

Limit sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar

- Salt
- Pepper
- Ground cumin
- 16 ounce jar of grape jelly
- 12 ounce jar pizza sauce
- Olive oil



Traditional Peanut Butter and Jelly

Total Servings: 1

Lunch Cost: **\$1.21**

This peanut butter and jelly sandwich is prepared on whole-wheat bread and packed with carrot sticks, apples slices, and low-fat milk. You can change up this go-to lunch by using different fruits and veggies.

Bag-it-Better: Give your child a choice of healthy options in deciding what to pack. Let them choose between carrots and celeray or a sliced or whole apple for lunch.

Some kids prefer their apples sliced! You can sprinkle lemon juice on the apple to keep it from turning brown after slicing.

Pack-it Safe: Remember to use an ice pack to keep the milk cold until lunchtime or your child can purchase a milk at the school cafeteria.

Ingredients:

- 2 slices whole-wheat bread
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter (or alternative)
- 1 tablespoon grape jelly

Pack with:

- 10 baby carrots
- 1 medium apple
- 1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation Time: 5 minutes



Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container	
Serving size 1 serving (629g)	
Amount per serving	610
Calories	% DV*
Total Fat 21g	27%
Sat. Fat 5g	25%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. 10mg	3%
Sodium 560mg	24%
Total Carb. 89g	32%
Fiber 12g	43%
Total Sugars 53g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 23g	
Vitamin D 3mcg	15%
Calcium 446mg	35%
Iron 3mg	15%
Potassium 1115mg	25%
**%DV = %Daily Value	



Homemade Chicken Noodle Soup

Total Servings: **6**

Total Cost: **\$11.57**

Lunch Cost: **\$1.91**

Planned leftovers make dinner and lunch-time easier for busy parents like you and me! This savory and delicious soup is a great, budget-friendly, and simple choice for packed lunches. Substitute the veggies your child likes best to make this homemade soup your own creation.

Bag-it-Better: Fresh, frozen, and canned without added salt vegetables are all smart choices and could be substituted in this meal. Buy some of each to last until your next shopping trip.

Pack-it Safe: Don't forget to use a container that will keep your hot foods hot and cold foods cold until eaten.

Ingredients:

3-pound chicken (or 12 ounces canned white meat chicken, drained)

1 onion

1 stalk of celery

10 baby carrots

8 ounces whole-wheat noodles

Salt and ground black pepper to taste

Pack With:

5 whole-wheat crackers

1 orange

1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation Time: 30 minutes

Total Time: 3 hours

Nutrition Facts	
1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving
	(591.2g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	600
	<small>% DV*</small>
Total Fat 14g	18%
Sat. Fat 4g	20%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. 105mg	35%
Sodium 350mg	15%
Total Carb. 73g	27%
Fiber 9g	32%
Total Sugars 28g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 48g	
Vitamin D 3mcg	15%
Calcium 409mg	30%
Iron 4mg	20%
Potassium 1049mg	20%

*%DV = %Daily Value

Pair with whole grain crackers, an orange, and low-fat milk to hit all the food groups and keep tummies full until the next meal or snack.

(Recipe adapted from Virginia Family Nutrition Program Chicken Noodle Soup)



Directions

1. Remove skin and place the chicken in a large pot. Cover the chicken completely with water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer until chicken falls off the bones (about 1 hour).
2. Remove the pot from the stove. Use a slotted spoon or tongs to remove the chicken pieces and bones from the water and place in a medium sized bowl to cool. Let remaining water (now broth) cool.
3. While cooling, wash and dice onions, celery, and carrots into small pieces. Set aside.
4. Separate the chicken from the bones and shred meat into bite-sized pieces.

To stretch your dollar further: use half the chicken in this recipe and freeze the other half for Creamy Chicken Salad in Week 2!

5. Put half the shredded chicken, vegetables, and noodles into the pot of broth. Bring to a boil, cover, and reduce heat. Cook about 15-20 minutes on medium heat until vegetables are tender. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
6. Enjoy the soup for dinner and save leftover soup for a packed lunch.

English Muffin Mini Pizza

Total Servings: 1

Total Cost: \$10.

Lunch Cost: \$2.05



A fun twist on a kid classic. Substitute whatever veggies your child prefers to make this pizza perfect. Go crazy with broccoli, onions, carrots, or all three! Better yet, have your child make the pizza with you. Melt cheese in the oven for a hot pizza or keep it cold and your child can assemble the pizza at school.

Bag-it-Better: Pineapple is a large fruit, so share it with everyone for dinner the night before and send what is remaining for lunch! Check for sales on fresh pineapple to make it more affordable. For a lower-cost option, try frozen or canned pineapple that is packaged in its own juice.

Pack-it Safe: Even if sending the pizza hot, you'll still need an ice pack to keep the milk and pineapple cold. Pack the pizza separately in aluminum foil and in an insulated lunch container.

Ingredients:

- 1 whole-wheat English muffin
- 2 tablespoons pizza sauce
- 2 tablespoons reduced fat cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1/4 of a green pepper, diced

Pack with:

- 1/2 cup pineapple, cut into bite-sized chunks
- 1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation Time: 5 minutes (if served cold); 10 minutes (if served hot) Can melt in the microwave for 30 seconds, or the oven at 350F for 5 minutes.



Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container
Serving size **1 serving**
(462.92g)

Amount per serving
Calories **340**

% DV*

Total Fat 7g **9%**

Sat. Fat 3.5g **18%**

Trans Fat 0g

Cholest. 25mg **8%**

Sodium 550mg **24%**

Total Carb. 54g **20%**

Fiber 7g **25%**

Total Sugars 28g

Includes g of Added Sugars

Protein 19g

Vitamin D 3mcg **15%**

Calcium 618mg **50%**

Iron 2mg **15%**

Potassium 762mg **15%**

**%DV = %Daily Value

Tips for cutting a pineapple: Remove the top with a knife. Slice down the sides, cutting off the tough outer skin and bottom layer. Cut down the sides again, careful to avoid the hard inner core, until only the core is left. Cut up the fruit into bite-sized chunks.

Black Beans and Rice

Total Servings: 6

Total Cost: \$5.89

Lunch Cost: \$1.60

Enjoy this meal together as a family the night before, and pack the leftovers. You may not be able to eat together as a family for lunch, but you can pack a special note with his or her lunch so you are together in thought. Cherish those nightly dinners together! They are gone too quickly, and eating together is an important habit to establish early and one you will all remember.

Bag-it-Better: Beans are a hearty protein, packed with fiber and other important nutrients. Whether you use dry beans or canned, involve your child when you cook this meal. Let them stir, chop, or snap depending on their age level.

Pack-it Safe: Beans are easier to keep at a safe temperature zone than meat, but you will still need a hot container to keep this meal warm until lunchtime.

Ingredients:

15 ounces canned black beans, drained and rinsed
(or 1 cup dry beans, cooked)

1 onion, diced

1 green pepper, diced

15 ounces canned low sodium
diced tomatoes

1/8 teaspoon ground cumin

1/4 teaspoon minced garlic

1 cup brown rice

2-15 ounce cans no added
salt green beans (or 2 cups fresh,
trimmed and snapped)

Pack With:

Plum

1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Total Time: 30 minutes

Nutrition Facts	
1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving
	(663.49g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	370
% DV*	
Total Fat 4.5g	6%
Sat. Fat 2g	10%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. 10mg	3%
Sodium 220mg	10%
Total Carb. 67g	24%
Fiber 12g	43%
Total Sugars 24g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 18g	
Vitamin D 3mcg	15%
Calcium 428mg	35%
Iron 4mg	25%
Potassium 1107mg	25%
*%DV = %Daily Value	

Directions

1. Cook the brown rice according to package directions. Cook the green beans according to can directions.
2. Open beans and pour into a colander. Rinse under cool water. Allow to drain and set aside.
3. Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add onions and green pepper. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Add tomatoes and beans to pan and mix together. Add the cumin and garlic. Continue to cook for an additional 5-10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
5. Spoon the bean mixture over the brown rice. Serve with green beans as a side.

Pair with a plum and low-fat milk for a complete lunch with all the food groups.

(Recipe adapted from Virginia Family Nutrition Program Southwestern Beans and Rice)

Simply Baked Chicken Drumstick

Total Servings: **6**

Total Cost: **\$11.01**

Lunch Cost: **\$3.06**

Drumsticks are often low-cost and easily prepared as an option for dinner and for leftovers. This simple recipe uses minimal ingredients for maximum taste and family enjoyment. Involve your child in the meal by sprinkling salt and pepper, mashing the potatoes (who doesn't enjoy that?), and setting the table.

Bag-it-Better: If peaches are not in season, choose canned peaches packed in juice.

Pack-it Safe: Keep these leftovers (and your child) safe by placing foods in a hot packed container. The drumstick should stay hot packed in aluminum foil and an insulated lunch container, and the mashed potatoes in a thermos.

Ingredients:

- 8-12 chicken drumsticks (about 2 pounds)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 6 white potatoes, cubed
- 1/4 cup low-fat milk
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2-15 ounce cans of no salt added green peas

Pack With:

- 1 medium peach
- 1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation Time: 30 minutes

Total Time: 1 hour

Nutrition Facts	
1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving
	(799.93g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	570
	% DV*
Total Fat 14g	18%
Sat. Fat 5g	25%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. 165mg	55%
Sodium 290mg	13%
Total Carb. 68g	25%
Fiber 9g	32%
Total Sugars 32g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 45g	
Vitamin D 3mcg	15%
Calcium 372mg	30%
Iron 4mg	20%
Potassium 1614mg	35%

*%DV = %Daily Value



Directions:

1. Heat oven to 375°F.
2. Sprinkle some olive oil in the bottom of a roasting pan or 9x13 pan (just enough so drumsticks do not stick). Arrange drumsticks in pan, spaced apart so they are not touching.
3. Sprinkle drumsticks with salt, pepper, and remaining oil.
4. Bake for 40 minutes, or until temperature has reached 165°F.
5. While baking, bring a medium pot of water to a boil on the stove. Add and boil until soft.
6. Once potatoes are soft, remove from heat and drain remaining water. Add salt, pepper, milk, and butter to the potatoes and mash with a mixer or potato masher. Mix well.
7. Cook green peas according to the directions on the can.

Weekly Shopping Planner



Fruits

Focus on whole fruit

- 1 bunch grapes
- 1 small watermelon
- 1 banana
- 1 small honeydew melon



Vegetables

Vary your veggies

- 1 red onion
- 1 bunch celery
- 1 green pepper
- 1 pound baby carrots
- 1 bunch romaine lettuce
- 15 ounces canned corn (or 1 cob)



Dairy

Move to low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt

- 8 ounce block reduced fat cheddar cheese
- 1 gallon low-fat (1%) milk



Grains

Make half your grains whole grains

- 1 loaf whole-wheat bread
- 8 whole-wheat tortillas
- 1 package whole-wheat pitas



Protein Foods

Vary your protein routine

- 1 pound 93% lean ground turkey
- 1 package hummus
- 3 pounds pork shoulder roast
- 1 dozen eggs
- 2-15 ounce cans lima beans
- 15 ounces canned black beans
- 6 ounces unsalted almonds



Other Items

Limit sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar

- Light mayonnaise
- Distilled vinegar
- Worcestershire sauce
- 15 ounces salsa
- Chili powder
- Salt
- Ground black pepper
- Cinnamon
- Paprika
- Vanilla



Turkey Burrito

Total Servings: 8

Total Cost: \$15.09

Lunch Cost: \$1.89

Ground turkey is a healthy, great tasting alternative to ground beef. This meal can be served for dinner the night before, or can be used as several packed lunches for the whole family over a few days. Whether for dinner or lunch, let your children have fun and get creative assembling their own burritos.

Bag-it-Better: Honeydew melons may be costly if they aren't in season. Head to the grocery store or farmers market with your child. Let him or her choose a budget-friendly fruit that is in season to include in the packed lunch.

Pack-it Safe: Be sure to pack each item separately, so that the tortillas don't get soggy and everything stays at a safe temperature. You children may enjoy assembling their own burritos at school!

Ingredients:

- 8 whole-wheat tortillas
- 1 pound 93% lean ground turkey
- 15 ounces canned black beans, drained and rinsed
- 15 ounces canned no salt added corn, drained and rinsed (or 1 fresh corn cob)
- 1/2 cup salsa
- 1 bunch romaine lettuce, shredded
- 1 cup shredded low-fat cheese

Pack With:

- 1/2 cup honeydew melon to hit all the food groups and have a satisfied kiddo.

Preparation Time: 20 minutes

Cooking tip for corn on the cob: put entire corn ear (husk and all) in the microwave for 3 min. Let stand 1 minute. Viola! Perfectly cooked corn.

Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving
	(378.38g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	370
	% DV*
Total Fat 13g	17%
Sat. Fat 5g	25%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. 55mg	18%
Sodium 520mg	23%
Total Carb. 45g	16%
Fiber 9g	32%
Total Sugars 10g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 23g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 169mg	15%
Iron 3mg	15%
Potassium 766mg	15%
*%DV = %Daily Value	



Directions

1. Cook the ground turkey in a skillet on medium-high heat. Break apart with a spatula into small crumbled pieces. Continue to cook until turkey is all browned.
2. Add black beans, corn, and salsa to the turkey. Mix well and reduce heat to a simmer.
3. Wrap mixture in a whole-wheat tortilla with romaine lettuce and low-fat cheese and enjoy.



French Toast

Total Servings: 8

Total Cost: **\$12.12**

Lunch Cost: **\$1.52**

Wake your kids up to the wonderful smell of French toast! Make this quick French toast recipe in the morning for breakfast and pack what is left over for lunch. Breakfast can be served anytime. Plus, eggs are a cheap, healthy protein option.

Bag-it-Better: Teach your child at an early age about portion control by using smaller plates and asking questions, such as "Is your belly full?" when they ask for more.

Pack-it-Safe: French toast contains eggs and needs to be kept cold until lunchtime. Don't forget to add in a cold pack to your child's lunch.

Ingredients:

4 large eggs
1 cup low-fat (1%) milk
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
16 slices whole-wheat bread
1 tablespoon olive oil
Packed With:
10 baby carrots
1/4 cup unsalted almonds
1 Banana

Preparation Time:

10 minutes



(Recipe adapted from Virginia Family Nutrition Program French Toast with Fruit Sauce)

Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving
	(409.83g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	550
	<small>% DV*</small>
Total Fat 25g	32%
Sat. Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. 95mg	32%
Sodium 400mg	17%
Total Carb. 70g	25%
Fiber 14g	50%
Total Sugars 27g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 20g	
Vitamin D 1mcg	4%
Calcium 280mg	20%
Iron 5mg	25%
Potassium 1232mg	25%
<small>*%DV = %Daily Value</small>	

Directions:

1. Break open the eggs and pour into a bowl. Add milk, cinnamon, and vanilla to the eggs. Beat until mixed well.
2. Heat oil in a large skillet on medium-high heat.
3. Dip one slice of bread at a time in the egg mixture to coat both sides. Place in hot skillet. Brown each side about 2 minutes. Remove from skillet. Repeat with each slice of bread.

Pulled Pork Barbeque

Total Servings: 6

Total Cost: \$14.19

Lunch Cost: \$2.37

A slow-cooker makes this meal an easy dinner for your family, and an oh-so-convenient packed lunch the next day. Talk together about your day while you finish making the side dishes and setting the table. Kids generally enjoy time and attention above anything else you can give them. Give them small jobs to do to help and be sure to tell them they are doing a good job.

Bag-it-Better: Watermelon is a large fruit. Use it in multiple packed lunches over the week when in season.

Pack-it-Safe: Remember to keep the hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Pack the pulled pork in a thermos to keep it hot until lunchtime. Also, remind small children to politely spit out the watermelon seeds or purchase a seedless watermelon to avoid choking.

Option: Make the cornbread from scratch or buy some ready-made at your bakery.

Ingredients:

- 3 pounds pork shoulder roast, visible fat removed
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon chili powder
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 2-15 ounce cans no salt added lima beans, drained and rinsed
- 6 small squares premade cornbread

Pack With:

- 1/2 cup watermelon chunks
- 1 cup of low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 5 hours

Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving
	(747.06g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	620
	% DV*
Total Fat 19g	24%
Sat. Fat 7g	35%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. 165mg	55%
Sodium 520mg	23%
Total Carb. 52g	19%
Fiber 6g	21%
Total Sugars 20g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 59g	
Vitamin D 5mcg	25%
Calcium 462mg	35%
Iron 5mg	30%
Potassium 1546mg	35%
*%DV = %Daily Value	



Directions

1. Place the pork roast into the slow cooker. Pour in the water, vinegar, Worcestershire, paprika, chili powder, and black pepper. Cook on high until the roast shreds easily with a fork (about 5 hours).
2. Cook the lima beans in a medium sized pot about 15 minutes prior to dinner.

Enjoy the dinner as a family and send the leftovers for lunch.
Pack with a milk to include something from all the food groups.

(Recipe adapted from Virginia Family Nutrition Program Barbeque Pork Chops)

Whole-Wheat Pita Pocket

Total Servings: 1

Total Cost: **\$8.97**

(price of watermelon included in above recipe)

Lunch Cost: **\$2.17**

This tried and true lunch is great when short on time. It's easy, fast, delicious, and flexible. Fill this pita pocket with endless possibilities of your child's favorite ingredients. Brainstorm with your child on what to include and try each other's favorite combinations!

Bag-it-Better: Watermelon is a great summer fruit, but isn't always in season. Use watermelon in multiple packed lunches and serve with dinner or breakfast when in season.

Pack-it-Safe: Even though this lunch doesn't contain meat, it still needs a cold pack. Pack the pita ingredients separately if your child's lunch is later in the day, so the pita doesn't get soggy.

Ingredients:

- 1 whole-wheat pita
- 1/4 cup hummus
- 1/4 cup green pepper strips

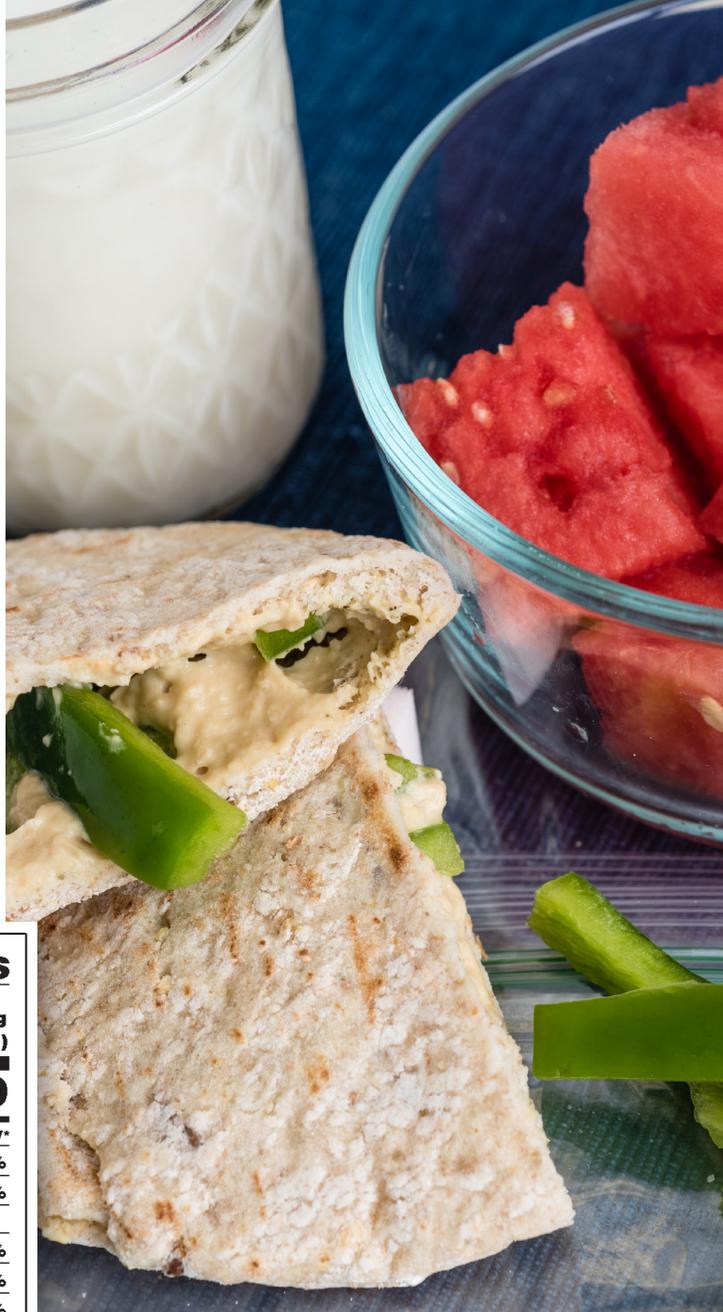
Pack With:

- 1/2 cup watermelon chunks
- 1 cup of low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation Time: 5 minutes

Nutrition Facts	
1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving
	(482.75g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	410
	% DV*
Total Fat 9g	12%
Sat. Fat 2.5g	13%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. 10mg	3%
Sodium 600mg	26%
Total Carb. 68g	25%
Fiber 7g	25%
Total Sugars 20g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 18g	
Vitamin D 3mcg	15%
Calcium 354mg	25%
Iron 3mg	20%
Potassium 732mg	15%

*%DV = %Daily Value



Directions

Hummus usually works best when spread around in the pita. Drop the chopped veggies in and they should stick to the sides!



Creamy Chicken Salad

Serving Size: 6

Total Cost: **\$6.80** (cost of chicken not included)

Lunch Cost: **\$1.31**

Who doesn't enjoy dipping? This non-traditional chicken salad is eaten with whole-grain crackers instead of bread. For this meal, creamy and crunchy are a perfect match. Make a large batch and send in everyone's lunch for the week!

**You can use the chicken saved from Week 1 Chicken Noodle Soup to stretch your dollar further. Simply thaw your frozen leftover chicken in the refrigerator one day before you want to make this meal and you will have a very fast lunch or dinner for the whole family!

Bag-it-Better: Some children really like to dip foods and will eat more when dipping is an option. Add in some extra veggies like carrot and celery sticks for more dipping fun.

Pack-it-Safe: Be sure the temperature of this creamy lunch stays cool with one or two ice packs.

Ingredients:

2- 2 ½ cups boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cooked and diced (or 12 ounce canned white meat chicken, drained)

1/2 red onion, finely diced

1 stalk celery, finely diced

1/4 cup light mayo

10 whole-wheat crackers

Packed With:

1/2 cup grapes, halved

1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

(Recipe adapted from Virginia Family Nutrition Program Chicken Salad)



Nutrition Facts	
1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving
	(431.67g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	410
% DV*	
Total Fat 13g	17%
Sat. Fat 3.5g	18%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. 60mg	20%
Sodium 440mg	19%
Total Carb. 47g	17%
Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 26g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 28g	
Vitamin D 3mcg	15%
Calcium 336mg	25%
Iron 2mg	10%
Potassium 746mg	15%
**%DV = %Daily Value	

Directions

1. Mix together diced chicken, onion, celery, and low-fat mayo. Salt and pepper if desired.
2. Cut up some grapes and add to the recipe, or simply serve along with the chicken salad for lunch.

Complete this meal with a serving of milk.

Weekly Shopping Planner



Fruits

Focus on whole fruit

- 1 apple
- 1 bunch grapes
- 4 ounce package raisins
- 4 ounce package dried cranberries



Protein Foods

Vary your protein routine

- 2 1/2 ounces deli turkey and/or ham
- 1 dozen eggs
- 10 ounce container hummus



Vegetables

Vary your veggies

- 1 bunch romaine lettuce
- 1 cucumber
- 1 avocado
- 1 pound baby carrots
- 1 sweet potato
- 1 package of cherry tomatoes
- 15 ounces canned no salt added corn



Dairy

Move to low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt

- 8 ounce block reduced fat cheddar cheese
- 1 gallon low-fat (1%) milk
- 8 ounces light sour cream
- 6 ounces low-fat vanilla yogurt



Grains

Make half your grains whole grains

- 16 ounce box of whole-grain crackers
- Whole-wheat tortillas
- 1 bag brown rice
- 1 bag of low sodium, low-fat popcorn
- 1 bag of unsalted pretzels



Other Items

Limit sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar



Chef Salad

Total Servings: 1

Total Cost: \$12.34

Lunch Cost: \$2.10

This salad screams variety! Mix and match whatever ingredients you have on hand. Salads are a great way to let your child choose what to eat! They can choose the toppings and (depending on age) have fun helping you cut and prepare them.

Bag-it-Better: Some vegetables will be less expensive when in season. Be sure to include those on your grocery list when shopping for this salad. Find a chart of when foods are typically in season in the Appendix.

Pack-it-safe: Be sure the temperature of the lunch stays safe by including an ice pack.

Ingredients:

- 1-2 cups romaine lettuce, shredded
- 1.5 ounces (about 2 thin slices) low sodium deli turkey and/or ham, diced
- 1 tablespoon reduced fat cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1/2 cup cherry tomatoes, halved

Salad Dressing:

- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 cup vinegar
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon Parmesan cheese
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder,
- 1/2 teaspoon celery salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Pack With:

- 1/4 cup raisins
- 5 whole-wheat crackers

Preparation Time: 5 minutes



Nutrition Facts	
1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving (398.85g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	360
<hr/>	
Total Fat 10g	13%
Sat. Fat 2g	10%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. 25mg	8%
Sodium 590mg	26%
Total Carb. 54g	20%
Fiber 8g	29%
Total Sugars 29g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 17g	
<hr/>	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 139mg	10%
Iron 3mg	15%
Potassium 1075mg	25%
*%DV = %Daily Value	



Directions

1. Combine all dressing ingredients in a jar with a tight lid. A mason jar works well. Shake vigorously to blend. Pack 2 tablespoons of dressing in a small jar. Store leftover dressing in the refrigerator.
2. Layer romaine lettuce with deli meat, tomatoes, and cheese in lunch container.
3. Serve with raisins and whole-wheat crackers.

(Recipe adapted from Virginia Family Nutrition Program Homemade Italian Dressing)

Brown Rice with Cucumber, Hummus, and Avocado

Total Servings: 1

Total Cost: **\$6.12**

Lunch Cost: **\$2.55**

Save on the packing containers with this one-dish, layered lunch. The hearty beans and avocado will provide a filling lunch that can be served hot or cold. This lovely mix of flavors and textures can be easily packed using leftover rice from a previous dinner.

Bag-it-Better: Pack this meal the night before and save time in the morning. Add in some lemon or lime juice to keep the avocado from browning and leave in the fridge overnight. Pack with a milk cup and this meal is good to go! Your child may also prefer to buy a milk at school.

Pack-it-Safe: Remember to send this lunch with an ice pack so it stays cold until lunchtime.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup brown rice
- 1/2 cucumber, diced
- 1/4 cup hummus
- 1/2 avocado, diced (optional, sprinkle with lemon juice to prevent browning)

Pack With:

- 1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation time: 5 minutes

Directions

1. In a container, layer cucumber, hummus, and avocado over brown rice.

Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving
	(717.84g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	560
	<small>% DV*</small>
Total Fat 20g	26%
Sat. Fat 4g	20%
<i>Trans Fat</i> 0g	
Cholest. 10mg	3%
Sodium 270mg	12%
Total Carb. 82g	30%
Fiber 11g	39%
Total Sugars 16g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 18g	
Vitamin D 3mcg	15%
Calcium 387mg	30%
Iron 3mg	15%
Potassium 1187mg	25%
<small>*%DV = %Daily Value</small>	



Tortilla Roll-up

Total Servings: 1

Total Cost: **\$7.77**

Lunch Cost: **\$2.15**



You really cannot have enough quick packed lunch options! This lunch is quick, fun, and something you can help your child with or have your child make on his or her own. Use your leftover lettuce from making a Chef Salad (above) to stretch your dollar further.

Bag-it-Better: If there is time in the morning, talk to your child about their up-coming day while you roll these up. Try canned pears for variety, but remember to look for those canned in their own juice to limit added sugars in your child's diet.

Pack-it-Safe: Remember to send this lunch with an ice pack so it stays cold until it's eaten.

Ingredients:

- 1 whole-wheat tortilla
- 1 ounce (about 1 slice) low sodium deli turkey or ham
- 1 tablespoon reduced fat cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1/2 cup romaine lettuce, shredded

Pack With:

- 6 ounces low-fat vanilla yogurt
- 1 apple

Preparation Time: 5 minutes

Directions

1. Lay your tortilla flat on a hard but clean surface. Layer the turkey, cheese, and lettuce onto the tortilla. Begin rolling!
2. Serve with an apple and yogurt for a complete lunch.

Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container		
Serving size		1 serving
		(450.68g)
Amount per serving		
Calories		400
		% DV*
Total Fat	9g	12%
Sat. Fat	4.5g	23%
Trans Fat	0g	
Cholest.	25mg	8%
Sodium	560mg	24%
Total Carb.	67g	24%
Fiber	8g	29%
Total Sugars	44g	
Includes g of Added Sugars		
Protein	20g	
Vitamin D	0mcg	0%
Calcium	366mg	30%
Iron	1mg	4%
Potassium	689mg	15%
*%DV = %Daily Value		



Eggs and Things

Total Servings: 1

Total Cost: **\$9.13**

Lunch Cost: **\$1.78**

Oh eggs! Is there really a more versatile food than an egg? There are so many ways to eat an egg. This packed lunch uses a hard-boiled egg paired with an item from each food group to create a balanced and irresistible lunch.

Bag-it-Better: For convenience, buy baby carrots to make this meal prep even easier.

Pack-it-Safe: Eggs can be hard-boiled and stored in the refrigerator for one week, but peeled eggs need to be eaten the same day.

Ingredients:

- 2 hard-boiled eggs
- 1/4 cup unsalted pretzels
- 1/2 cup grapes
- 1/4 cup hummus
- 10 baby carrots

Preparation Time:

15 minutes

To hard-boil an egg: Place your eggs in a pot and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then cover, remove from the heat and set aside 8 to 10 minutes. Drain, cool in ice water and peel.

Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container
Serving size 1 serving
(450.68g)

Amount per serving
Calories 400

% DV*

Total Fat 9g 12%

Sat. Fat 4.5g 23%

Trans Fat 0g

Cholest. 25mg 8%

Sodium 560mg 24%

Total Carb. 67g 24%

Fiber 8g 29%

Total Sugars 44g

Includes g of Added Sugars

Protein 20g

Vitamin D 0mcg 0%

Calcium 366mg 30%

Iron 1mg 4%

Potassium 689mg 15%

*%DV = %Daily Value



Sweet Potato Bake

Servings: 1

Total Cost: \$7.13

Lunch Cost: \$1.18

Who doesn't love a food that tastes good and is good for you? Sweet potatoes are packed with nutrients and also are delicious. Bake the potato in the morning in the microwave (or the night before) and open a can of corn for a quick meal that is ready in minutes. Refrigerate the leftover corn or use it in your own packed lunch.

Bag-it-Better: Include canned beans or substitute plain yogurt for the sour cream if you want to add some protein to this meal.

Pack-it-Safe: Keep the potato hot with a tightly sealed thermos and send an ice pack for the additional ingredients.

Ingredients:

- 1 sweet potato
 - 2 tablespoons canned no salt added corn
 - 1 tablespoon dried cranberries
 - 1 tablespoon light sour cream
- Pack With:
- 1 cup low sodium, low-fat pop-corn

Preparation Time: 10 minutes

Total Time: 45 minutes

Nutrition Facts	
1 servings per container	
Serving size	1 serving
	(173.58g)
Amount per serving	
Calories	190
	% DV*
Total Fat 2g	3%
Sat. Fat 1g	5%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholest. <5mg	2%
Sodium 55mg	2%
Total Carb. 41g	15%
Fiber 6g	21%
Total Sugars 14g	
Includes g of Added Sugars	
Protein 4g	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 69mg	4%
Iron 1mg	6%
Potassium 640mg	15%

*%DV = %Daily Value

Directions

1. Heat oven to 400°F.
2. Pierce sweet potato with a fork 5-6 times for even cooking. Wrap sweet potato in aluminum foil and bake for about 40 minutes to soften.
3. To microwave sweet potato, pierce with fork 5-6 times. Place on a microwave safe dish and cook on high 4-6 minutes or until soft. Handle dish and potato carefully, as they will be very hot.



Send the corn, sour cream, and cranberries in separate containers so your child can assemble at lunch.

Weekly Shopping Planner



Fruits

Focus on whole fruit

- 1 banana
- 1 pear
- 1 orange
- 1 small container strawberries



Vegetables

Vary your veggies

- 1 onion
- 1 green pepper
- 3 carrots
- 1 celery stalk
- 2 stalks broccoli (about 1 pound)
- 2 zucchinis
- 1/2 cup sugar snap peas
- 48 oz canned low sodium diced tomatoes
- 15 ounces canned low-sodium tomato soup



Grains

Make half your grains whole grains

- 1 box whole grain cereal
- 16 ounces whole-wheat spaghetti
- 2 tablespoons low-fat granola
- 1 loaf whole-wheat bread



Protein Foods

Vary your protein routine

- 1 pound 90% lean ground beef
- 4 ounces boneless, skinless chicken breast



Dairy

Move to low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt

- 1 gallon low-fat (1%) milk
- 6 ounces low-fat vanilla yogurt
- 8 ounce block reduced fat cheddar cheese
- 1 package butter



Other Items

Limit sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar

- 1 bottle of reduced sodium soy sauce
- 1 can of unsalted cashews



Spaghetti and Broccoli

Servings: 6

Total Cost: **\$9.45**

Lunch Cost: **\$2.76**

Spaghetti is one of my favorite leftover meals. Let your children pack it themselves. Let them spoon the leftovers into their packing containers. Add a pear and cup of milk - and done!

Bag-it-Better: Fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and veggies are all smart choices and could be substituted in this meal. Buy some of each to last until your next shopping trip.

Pack-it-Safe: Pack the spaghetti and broccoli in a thermos to keep hot until lunchtime. Send an ice pack with the milk or let your child purchase a milk from school.

Ingredients:

8 ounces whole-wheat spaghetti noodles
1 pound 90% lean ground beef
48 ounces canned low sodium diced tomatoes
2 stalks broccoli (about 1 pound), chopped

Pack With:

1 pear
1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Total Time: 1 hour



Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container

Serving size

1 serving
(825.79g)

Amount per serving

Calories

550

% DV*

Total Fat 12g **15%**

Sat. Fat 5g **25%**

Trans Fat 0g

Cholest. 80mg **27%**

Sodium 220mg **10%**

Total Carb. 78g **28%**

Fiber 15g **54%**

Total Sugars 37g

Includes g of Added Sugars

Protein 40g

Vitamin D 3mcg **15%**

Calcium 450mg **35%**

Iron 6mg **35%**

Potassium 1734mg **35%**

*%DV = %Daily Value

Directions

1. Cook ground beef skillet over medium-high heat until brown.
2. Add tomatoes and bring mixture to a boil. Lower heat and simmer for 45 minutes.
3. After sauce has been cooking for 45 minutes, prepare spaghetti noodles according to package directions. Drain.
4. Cook broccoli in a separate non-stick skillet with a small amount of oil, while sauce and noodles are cooking. Cook for around 5 minutes.
5. Mix with noodles and sauce. Let stand for 5 minutes before serving.

Use the leftovers for packing! Add in a pear and low-fat milk to include all the food groups.

(Recipe adapted from Virginia Family Nutrition Program Tomato Beef and Noodle Dinner)

Yogurt Parfait

Servings: 1

Total Cost: **\$8.28**

Lunch Cost: **\$1.35**

This is a great light lunch or quick snack and you can add pretty much anything to it! The creamy yogurt combined with the crunch of the granola makes this meal exciting. Letting your child choose their own favorite ingredients makes this meal a real kid pleaser.

Bag-it-Better: This meal has so many possibilities! Substitute your child's favorite fruit or whatever is currently in season for a low-cost option.

Pack-it-Safe: Remember to send a cold pack with this lunch so the yogurt stays at a safe temperature. Pack the items separately so the granola doesn't get mushy.

Option: Frozen fruit is an additional way to keep your food cold longer. Spoon frozen fruit on top of the packed yogurt. It will be mostly thawed but still nice and cold by the time your child eats lunch. You should still pack this lunch with an cold pack, especially if your child has a later lunch time.

Ingredients:

- 6 ounces low-fat vanilla yogurt
- 1/2 cup strawberries, capped and sliced
- 2 tablespoons low-fat granola

Pack With:

- 1/2 cup sugar snap peas



Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container
Serving size **1 serving**
(257.35g)

Amount per serving
Calories 240

% DV*

Total Fat 6g **8%**

Sat. Fat 2g **10%**

Trans Fat 0g

Cholest. 10mg **3%**

Sodium 115mg **5%**

Total Carb. 37g **13%**

Fiber 3g **11%**

Total Sugars 30g

Includes g of Added Sugars

Protein 11g

Vitamin D 0mcg **0%**

Calcium 314mg **25%**

Iron 1mg **6%**

Potassium 565mg **10%**

*%DV = %Daily Value

Directions

1. Mix together the yogurt and strawberries. Pack granola separately for mixing in at school.

Chicken Lo Mein

Servings: 6

Total Cost: \$8.32

Lunch Cost: \$1.70

Most kids love noodles. These are an Asian-style prepared with a little vegetable oil and soy sauce for flavoring and lots of vegetables. You can use any vegetables your family likes, but we've suggested some with the recipe below.

Bag-it-Better: Add peanuts or cashews if no one has nut allergies for extra flavor and texture. Exposing your kids to new foods and flavors will help them be receptive to new foods.

Pack-it-Safe: Pack the chow-mien in a thermos to keep it hot until lunchtime.

During dinner, remember to relax and enjoy one another. Ask your child what was the best part of their day.

Ingredients:

- 8 ounces whole-wheat spaghetti noodles
- 4 ounces boneless, skinless chicken breast, sliced into thin strips
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 3 carrots, chopped
- 2 zucchinis, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 1 celery stalk, chopped
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon reduced sodium soy sauce

Pack With:

- 1 orange, sliced
- 1 cup low-fat (1%) milk

Preparation Time: 20 minutes

Total Time: 30 minutes

Nutrition Facts		
1 servings per container		
Serving size		1 serving
		(825.79g)
Amount per serving		
Calories		550
<hr/>		
		% DV*
Total Fat	12g	15%
Sat. Fat	5g	25%
Trans Fat	0g	
Cholest.	80mg	27%
Sodium	220mg	10%
Total Carb.	78g	28%
Fiber	15g	54%
Total Sugars	37g	
Includes g of Added Sugars		
Protein	40g	
<hr/>		
Vitamin D	3mcg	15%
Calcium	450mg	35%
Iron	6mg	35%
Potassium	1734mg	35%
**%DV = %Daily Value		



Directions

1. Prepare noodles according to package directions.
2. Heat oil in frying pan over high heat. Stir fry chicken and onion for three minutes, stirring constantly to prevent burning.
3. Add celery, green pepper, zucchini, carrots, and any other stir fry vegetables for 1 minute or until all vegetables are crisp-tender.
4. Serve over noodles.

Use these leftovers along with an orange and low-fat milk for a complete and yummy lunch for your child.

(Recipe adapted from Virginia Family Nutrition Program Chicken Stir-fry)

Grilled Cheese Sandwich

Servings: 1

Total Cost: **\$11.36**

Lunch Cost: **\$2.17**

There aren't many things in life better than a warm and crisp grilled cheese sandwich. Yum. This is a quick meal to fix in the morning which maintains crispiness until lunch time. This could also be a quick and easy dinner on nights where life is crazy and there is little time for cooking!

Bag-it-Better: This meal uses canned tomato soup for when you are too busy to prepare things from scratch. For canned soups, check the Nutrition Facts label to find an option that is low in saturated fat, sodium, and has little added sugar. It's important to remember is to construct a meal with at least a grain, protein food, and fruit or vegetable.

Pack-it-Safe: Pack soup in an insulated container to keep hot until lunch.

Ingredients:

- 2 slices whole-wheat bread
- 1 ounce sliced cheddar cheese
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 15 ounces low-sodium canned tomato soup

Pack With:

- 1/2 cup cantaloupe, diced



Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container		1 serving
Serving size		(257.35g)
Amount per serving		
Calories		240
		% DV*
Total Fat	6g	8%
Sat. Fat	2g	10%
Trans Fat	0g	
Cholest.	10mg	3%
Sodium	115mg	5%
Total Carb.	37g	13%
Fiber	3g	11%
Total Sugars	30g	
Includes g of Added Sugars		
Protein	11g	
Vitamin D	0mcg	0%
Calcium	314mg	25%
Iron	1mg	6%
Potassium	565mg	10%
*%DV = %Daily Value		

Directions

1. Heat butter in skillet over medium heat.
2. Place bread in skillet and top with cheese. Cover skillet and cook for 2-3 minutes, or until cheese is melted. Check bottom of bread to keep from burning.
3. When cheese is melted and bread is golden brown, sandwich bread together.
4. Prepare tomato soup according to package directions.



Cereal and Milk

Servings: 1

Total Cost: **\$8.71**

Lunch Cost: **\$1.05**

Out of time in the morning? Cereal is a great meal for parents in a bind! It is also one of those foods that kids never tire of, so embrace it - and send cereal.

Bag-it-Better: Cereal provides a healthy quick lunch as long as you include foods from other food groups. Choose whole grain cereals that are low in added sugars, with no more than 7 grams of sugar per serving.

Pack-it-Safe: An easy way to help your child open a packed banana at school is to place a small cut into the peel. Use an ice pack to keep the milk cold until lunch time.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup whole-grain cereal
- 1 cup low-fat (1%) milk
- 1 banana

Pack With:

- 1 celery stalk, cut into strips
- 1 ounce unsalted cashews



Nutrition Facts

1 servings per container
Serving size **1 serving**
(257.35g)

Amount per serving
Calories 240

		% DV*
Total Fat	6g	8%
Sat. Fat	2g	10%
Trans Fat	0g	
Cholest.	10mg	3%
Sodium	115mg	5%
Total Carb.	37g	13%
Fiber	3g	11%
Total Sugars	30g	
Includes g of Added Sugars		
Protein	11g	
Vitamin D	0mcg	0%
Calcium	314mg	25%
Iron	1mg	6%
Potassium	565mg	10%

*%DV = %Daily Value



Pack each ingredient separately. Tell your child how to assemble the meal when they are ready to eat.

Additional Tips for PACK-IT

Food Safety Guidelines for Packed Lunches

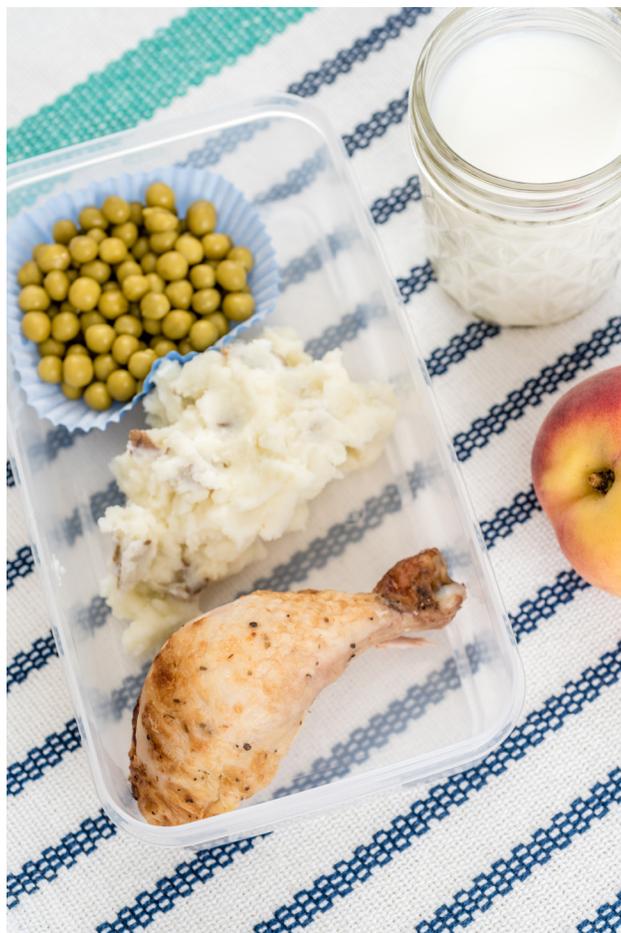
Packed lunches can easily be kept safe if they are handled and packed properly. Here are some tips for keeping your hot foods hot and cold foods cold until lunchtime. For more tips, go to: http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/keeping-bag-lunches-safe/ct_index

Keeping foods cold:

- Try to use at least two cold sources to keep foods cold until lunchtime. You can use a frozen gel packs and frozen milk or water.
- Place frozen packs on top and bottom of items that need to remain cold
 - If a refrigerator is available, place lunchbox inside with the lid or bag open. This helps the cold air reach the items better.
 - Insulated bags help keep food cold longer. Use paper bags only if items do not need to remain cold.

Keeping foods hot:

- Insulated containers such as a thermos are the best at keeping foods hot until lunchtime.
- Fill the container with boiling water, let stand for a few minutes, empty, and then fill with the already hot food.
- Keep containers closed until lunchtime.



Packing Lunch on a Budget

Save money on packed lunch with these tips in mind. The following will help you save money on food and also packing supplies.

- Buy fresh fruits and vegetables when in season and canned or frozen when not. Remember to buy canned or frozen fruits that are packed juice to limit added sugar.
- Purchase foods in large quantities instead of pre-packaged items.
 - Sliced cheese from a block of cheese instead of buying a cheese stick.
 - Pack a whole apple instead of packaged sliced apples.
 - Build your own meals instead of purchasing pre-packaged meals which often cost more.
- Buy reusable packing containers such as insulated bags, plastic or glass containers and water bottles. Wash and reuse containers to save money.
 - Be careful with glass containers and younger children as they may accidentally drop and break. Talk to your child about being careful with a glass container before sending.
- Send your own forks and spoons instead of purchasing plastic ones. If you are worried about your child losing silverware, wash and reuse plastic ones multiple times.



Make Packed Lunch Memories

There are many ways you can connect with your child by packing a lunch. Here are some ideas for creating special lunch memories.

- Send a note in your child's lunchbox to say "I love you" or simply "hope your day is going great."
- Let your child choose what fruits and veggie to include for lunch.
- Involve your child in cooking and making lunches together and picking foods out at the grocery store together.
- Have your own packed lunch together. These lunches make for a great picnic lunch at home or while on a hike together outside.



Simple Snacks for Kids

Snacks can be a great way to up your nutrition and fill in the gaps from your main meals. However, the snack foods we reach for are not always the greatest options for our health and weight. Aim to include 2-3 food groups from MyPlate for a healthy, balanced snack. Try these ideas for smart snacks that are perfect on the go, at the playground, or after school.

Fruit- No surprise here, fruit is nature's fast food. Apples, bananas, oranges, grapes, etc. are all quick to grab and go. Every mom should keep a piece of fruit in her purse to fend off the hunger tantrum every kid has now and then.

Vegetables- A little less portable than fruit, vegetables are still great snacks. If you wash, peel, and cut them ahead of time, it's very easy for kids to fix a snack themselves when they come home hungry after school or day care. For pickier eaters, a tasty dip will make veggies more fun to eat. Try these recipes for Hummus, Creamy Dill Dip, and Low-fat Ranch Dip.

Nuts- Nuts are also portable and filling snacks. Try to buy low/no salt. Nut butter also pairs well with fruit or veggies. Who doesn't love bananas and apples with peanut butter? Bugs on a Log are a classic pairing of peanut butter, celery and raisins, with a twist of kid-appeal in their fun name. If peanut or tree nut allergies are an issue for your family, you can find sunflower seed or soy nut butters to use instead.

String Cheese- A timeless and healthy option kids love to eat. Make sure you're buying reduced fat (part skim) varieties.

Air popped popcorn- Popcorn is a whole grain. When you buy the plain kernels instead of the microwave bags, it's extremely cheap, too. If you don't have an air popper, you can cook it in the microwave (Pour kernels into a microwave-safe bowl, top with a microwave-safe lid or plate and heat for about 5 minutes or until the popping slows down) or on the stovetop (Drizzle a little oil in the bottom of a pot, add popcorn kernels, cover and heat. Once it starts popping, shake the pot to keep it from burning on the bottom until the popping slows down). A spritz of non-stick cooking spray and your favorite seasonings will make the best bowl of popcorn you've ever had in less than 5 minutes.

Whole Grain Crackers- There is a wide variety of whole grain cracker options these days. Crackers are a blank canvas that you can top with different [healthy] ingredients to suit your cravings. Cheese crackers, peanut butter crackers, cream cheese and cucumber crackers. The possibilities are endless.



Portion Sizes Serving Chart

Pack lunches that meet your children's calorie needs, based on their age. Choosing smaller portions can help you stay within your child's calories needs but still provide the nutrition they need to keep them growing and active. Here's an easy guide to using your hand to estimate a smart size portion.

Right Size Your Portions!

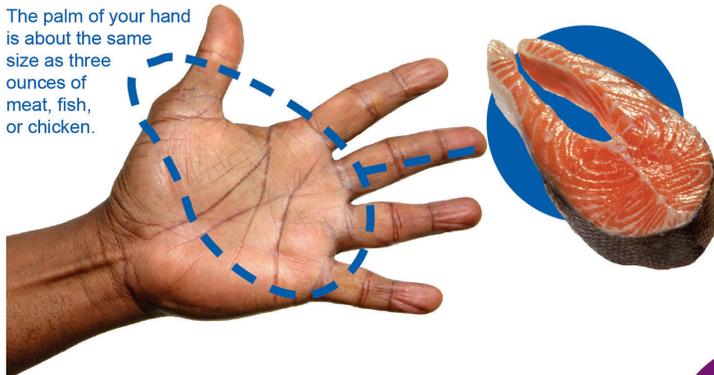
A serving size is what is recommended on a Nutrition Facts label, but what you actually eat is called your "portion." Portions served at restaurants have gotten larger over the years. Here's an easy guide to using your hand to estimate a smart size portion.



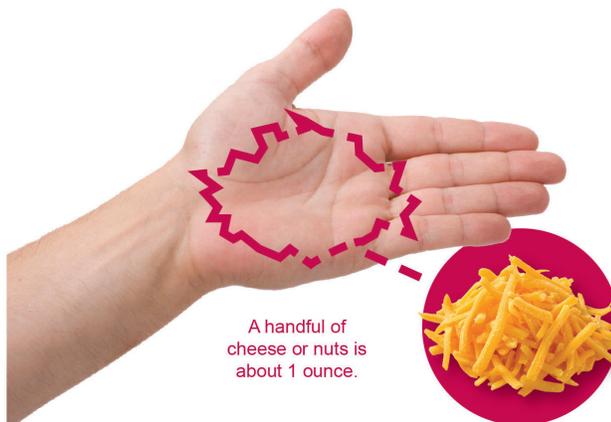
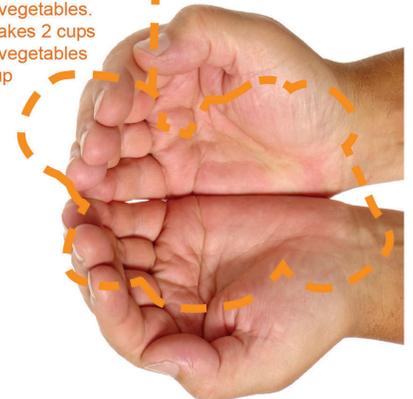
Your fist is about the size of one cup or one ounce of cereal.



Two handfuls is about the size of one serving of leafy green vegetables. Remember it takes 2 cups of leafy green vegetables to make a 1 cup serving.



The palm of your hand is about the same size as three ounces of meat, fish, or chicken.



A handful of cheese or nuts is about 1 ounce.



Your thumb is about the same size as one ounce of peanut butter or cheese.

Seasonal Produce Chart

Making half your child's lunch fruits and vegetables may seem expensive. However, buying fruits and vegetables when they are in season gives you the best value. Seasonal produce also has better taste and nutrition. You can find produce in season in your grocery store or your local farmers market. Use this chart to help decide which fruits and vegetables to pack with your child's lunch throughout the year.

Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter	Year Round
<p>FRUIT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> strawberries pineapple honeydew melon apricots mangos 	<p>FRUIT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> watermelon blueberries peaches nectarines cantaloupe cherries blackberries plums kiwifruit 	<p>FRUIT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> apples pineapples grapes cranberries persimmons pomegranates 	<p>FRUIT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> oranges lemons clementines limes pears grapefruit 	<p>FRUIT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> apples bananas papaya avocados
<p>VEGETABLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> broccoli peas spinach radishes asparagus rhubarb artichokes 	<p>VEGETABLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tomatoes corn bell peppers green beans cucumbers summer squash zucchini hot peppers black-eyed peas beets eggplant 	<p>VEGETABLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> butternut squash acorn squash pumpkin cauliflower mushrooms Swiss chard 	<p>VEGETABLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> cabbage sweet potatoes kale collard greens Brussels sprouts turnips parsnips 	<p>VEGETABLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> carrots lettuce onions potatoes celery mushrooms
				

How to Read a Nutrition Facts Label

Reading the Nutrition Facts labels on the foods and beverages you buy can help you make better choices. Knowing what to look for can help you choose items higher in nutrients you need more of and lower in nutrients you need to limit.

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)			
Servings Per Container about 2			
Amount Per Serving			
Calories 250		Calories from Fat 110	
			% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g			18%
Saturated Fat 3g			15%
Trans Fat 3g			
Cholesterol 30mg			10%
Sodium 470mg			20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g			10%
Dietary Fiber 0g			0%
Sugars 5g			
Proteins 5g			
Vitamin A			4%
Vitamin C			2%
Calcium			20%
Iron			4%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:			
	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Saturated Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g

For educational purposes only. This label does not meet the labeling requirements described in 21 CFR 101.9.

1 Serving Size

This section is the basis for determining number of calories, amount of each nutrient, and %DVs of a food. Use it to compare a serving size to how much you actually eat. Serving sizes are given in familiar units, such as cups or pieces, followed by the metric amount, e.g., number of grams.

2 Amount of Calories

If you want to manage your weight (lose, gain, or maintain), this section is especially helpful. The amount of calories is listed on the left side. The right side shows how many calories in one serving come from fat. In this example, there are 250 calories, 110 of which come from fat. The key is to balance how many calories you eat with how many calories your body uses. **Tip:** Remember that a product that's fat-free isn't necessarily calorie-free.

3 Limit these Nutrients

Eating too much total fat (including saturated fat and trans fat), cholesterol, or sodium may increase your risk of certain chronic diseases, such as heart disease, some cancers, or high blood pressure. The goal is to stay below 100%DV for each of these nutrients per day.

4 Get Enough of these Nutrients

Americans often don't get enough dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron in their diets. Eating enough of these nutrients may improve your health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and conditions.

5 Percent (%) Daily Value

This section tells you whether the nutrients (total fat, sodium, dietary fiber, etc.) in one serving of food contribute a little or a lot to your total daily diet.

The %DVs are based on a 2,000-calorie diet. Each listed nutrient is based on 100% of the recommended amounts for that nutrient. For example, 18% for total fat means that one serving furnishes 18% of the total amount of fat that you could eat in a day and stay within public health recommendations. Use the Quick Guide to Percent DV (%DV): 5%DV or less is low and 20%DV or more is high.

6 Footnote with Daily Values (DVs)

The footnote provides information about the DVs for important nutrients, including fats, sodium and fiber. The DVs are listed for people who eat 2,000 or 2,500 calories each day.

– The amounts for total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium are maximum amounts. That means you should try to stay below the amounts listed.

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