

# **Ask an Expert // Healthy School Lunches on a Budget**



HEALTHY  
SCHOOL  
LUNCHES  
ON A BUDGET



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*The carefree days of summer are quickly coming to an end. Soon parents and kids will have to return to the routine of homework, alarm setting and packing lunches. Here are some tips for packing healthy school lunches on a budget.*

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## **Use My Plate.**

Packing lunches according to My Plate recommendations will ensure your child is getting the nutrition he or she needs to thrive during the school day. Check out [choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov) for more information on what your child needs from each food group.

## **Involve the kids.**

School lunches are only economical and nourishing if your children actually eat them. Have children help plan or even pack their own lunches. For younger children, set out a few options in bins for each food group and have them choose one thing from each bin to incorporate into their meal.

## **Plan ahead.**

When planning your dinner menu for the week, consider dishes that make good leftovers to pack for your child's lunch. Contact your child's school to see if there is a microwave available for reheating food in the cafeteria.

## **Prep ahead.**

While you are cooking dinner, cut up some extra carrot sticks or slice more strawberries. Or while you are putting away leftovers, pack them directly into containers that can be sent

for lunch. Packing lunches the night before, rather than during the hectic morning, will increase the likelihood it will actually get done.

## **Pack your own snacks.**

While items like prepackaged trail mix or individually wrapped snack cakes are very convenient, they also often come with a high price tag. Mixing your own trail mix or bagging your own pretzels will not only save you money, but allow you to choose items that are lower in sugar and sodium than many prepackaged items.

## **Try reusable containers.**

Reusable containers are handy for keeping food from getting squished, but they can also save big bucks at the grocery store. When used daily, disposable sandwich bags get costly for both your wallet and the environment. Don't forget to write your child's name on the container so it can be returned if misplaced at school or on the bus.

## **Keep it fun.**

It is easy to get into a rut with school lunches. Changing it up with something as simple as cutting sandwiches or cheese into fun shapes can really brighten your child's day. Finding new, tasty recipes can also keep your children excited for the lunch bell and eager to refuel their bodies and brains. Check out [extension.usu.edu/foodsense](http://extension.usu.edu/foodsense) and [eatwellutah.org](http://eatwellutah.org) for some great recipes ideas for this year's lunch sack.

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