



Healthy
School Lunches

UNWRAPPED

A Week of Lunch Menus: In A Bag

http://www.organicvalley.coop/products_recipes/features/school_2006.html

Check out the menus below for a week's worth of lunch ideas you can **pack at home for your kids**.

Monday (or Day 1)

[Trail mix with nuts and dried fruit](#)

[Pasta with Greens and Feta](#) (from *Lunch Lessons*)

Grapes or blueberries

[Superstar Pumpkin Bar](#)

H2O, juice

Tuesday (or Day 2)

Tortilla chips and salsa

[Champion Chili](#)

[Organic Valley Cheddar Cheese or Colby Jack Stringles](#)

[Yogurt Honey Health Muffins](#) (from *Lunch Lessons*)

H2O, juice

Wednesday (or Day 3)

[Organic Valley Low Fat Cottage Cheese](#) with whole grain crackers or pita chips

[Thai Rice Noodle Salad](#)

Cucumber and carrot coins

[Raspberry Almond Thumbprints](#)

[Organic Valley Orange Juice](#) (Pulp-Added, Pulp-Free or Calcium-Added)

Thursday (or Day 4)

Air-Pop Popcorn or pretzels

"Ham 'n Monster" sandwich made with [Organic Valley Sliced Ham](#), [Organic Valley Muenster Cheese](#), sliced tomatoes and pickle spears...and anything else you want to pile on!

Heirloom apple or pear

[Super Duper Oaty Choco-Yums](#)

[Organic Valley Vanilla or Chocolate Soy Milk](#)

Friday (or Day 5)

Mini "broccoli bushes" with [Curried Veggie Dip](#)

[Oven Fried Chicken](#) (from *Lunch Lessons*)

[Organic Valley Egg](#) (hard cooked)

Fall raspberries served with a blend of [Organic Valley Sour Cream](#) and maple syrup

Smoothie made with [Organic Valley Orange Juice](#) and cherry yogurt



Solution #1: Big Helpers!

Packing healthy nutritious foods your children will eat can be tricky. Take the mystery out of it by letting them help pack their own lunch— supervised by you, of course.

School Lunch Ideas: 4 Easy & Nutritious School Lunch Menus

#1: Tried and true peanut butter & jelly

Peanut butter is an incredibly wholesome choice for sandwiches, not to mention an all-time favorite of most kids and adults. It's an excellent source of "heart-healthy" monounsaturated fats as well as antioxidants, vitamin E and folate. Peanut butter satisfies hunger with its energizing balance of healthful fat and protein. If your child has a peanut allergy or your school follows an anti-peanut policy, test out the equally delicious and nutrient-rich almond or cashew butters. Whenever possible, choose all-natural or organic nut butters to avoid hydrogenated trans-fats.

Mini Menu:

- All-natural peanut butter and jam (or banana slices) on wholegrain or Ezekeil bread
- ***Fun tip:*** *Cut sandwiches with cookie cutters into star or heart shapes!*
- Fresh-cut red pepper strips, sugar snap peas, and baby carrots with hummus or organic yogurt dip
- 2 organic fig cookies
- Rice milk, water, organic juice

#2: Time-crunched turkey roll-ups

If you're pinched for time, stocking your fridge with lunch basics like freshly sliced roast turkey and cheese makes things easy. Try a fun twist on the standard turkey sandwich by opting for a whole wheat or multigrain wrap. Kids love the different shape of a roll-up. Broaden their taste-buds and give them a few options of spreads such as Dijon mustard or hummus. Seek out hormone and antibiotic-free turkey and cold cut brands such as Applegate Farms on your next grocery trip. Keep kids healthy and alert by limiting the additives, nitrates and excess sodium found in many conventional cold cut brands.

Mini Menu:

- Turkey and organic cheese roll-up in a whole wheat wrap with lettuce, tomato and mustard or roasted red pepper hummus spread
- All-natural trail mix granola bar
- 1 cup red or green grapes
- Mini-bottle of water

#3: Tuna—An academic brain booster

If tuna fish salad is a big hit in your house, put a new spin on it with a fun mini-wholegrain roll or whole wheat pita pocket. Tuna is rich in omega-3 fatty acids which promote cognitive function while providing a great source of lean protein. Keep in mind warnings about excess mercury consumption, however, and choose chunk light tuna packed in water. Limit tuna to one to two times per week as a precaution. Pair tuna with a bit of organic mayonnaise or vegganaise or try Italian tuna salad made with "heart-healthy" extra-virgin olive oil and a splash of balsamic vinegar. Encourage your children to taste new flavors, tastes and textures.

Mini Menu:

- Mini tuna fish salad sandwich made with lite organic mayonnaise on a small 7-grain roll with lettuce and tomato
- Mini all-natural oatmeal-raisin cookies
- 1 cup mixed berries
- 4-ounce 100% organic juice box

#4: Cold-weather chili

Add a little fall flavor and spicy kick to your child's lunch by remaking last night's leftovers. A hearty chili packed with vegetables and beans is an easy way to sneak in nutrients and fiber. This dish provides the energy your child needs to power through the rest of the school day. Use a small insulated thermos container to keep chili warm. Involve kids by having them pick toppings such as a sprinkle of shredded cheddar cheese, a dollop of organic sour cream or a handful of diced red onion. Add lean ground turkey or chicken for a healthy, low-fat protein boost.

Mini Menu:

- Veggie or turkey chili (pack in small thermos container—1-2 cups)
- Fresh whole fruit or 1/4 cup dried fruit
- Organic chocolate pudding or organic yogurt
- 1 mini-bottle of water

Lunch storage and transportation

Now that lunch is prepared, consider storage and transportation before leaving the kitchen. Whether you choose a brown-bag or a colorful lunchbox, food safety is often a concern for many parents. Remember that lunches are left out at room temperature for several hours. It may be a good idea to invest in an insulated lunch box for your little ones. Check out <http://www.laptoplunches.com/>, <http://www.lunchboxes.com/>, or <http://www.potterybarnkids.com/> for child-friendly, insulated lunch boxes that keep food cool and fresh.

With these flavorful menu suggestions and cool lunchbox ideas, kids will be happy, energized and much healthier. Better yet, mom and dad can finally forget any complaints about soggy sandwiches and warm milk.



Solution #2: Pack at Night

It's not so easy getting the crew out the door in the morning for school. Try removing one of the energy drainers from your morning by packing lunches the night before.

Vegan Children

<http://vegkitchen.com/kid-friendly-recipes/school-lunch-recipes.htm>

Tired of the same lunch day after day? Here are some fresh ideas to liven up your next midday meal.

Sandwiches:

- Peanut butter and jelly OR Almond Butter & Jelly (less fat, more protein)
- Peanut butter and apple or banana slices
- Peanut butter and grated carrots
- Nut butter sandwiches on small crackers
- Nut butter and jelly on a whole grain bagel
- Almond butter and bananas
- Peanut butter with sliced bananas rolled up inside a flour tortilla
- Hummus, shredded carrots and celery rolled up inside a flour tortilla
- Hummus on whole wheat bread
- Hummus or baba ghanouj instead of mayo
- Hummus with tomatoes, cucumber and lettuce
- Hummus with sliced grapes
- Hummus with grated carrot
- Hummus with sliced & sautéed mushrooms
- Leftover pasta or grain dishes in a wrap
- Cucumbers or tomatoes and soy cream cheese with sprouts in a wrap
- Tofu mayonnaise or Vegganaise mixed with nut butters, celery and peppers
- Vegan cream cheese and jelly sandwiches, cut up into quarters or fingers
- Avocado mashed on crackers
- Roasted red pepper with tomato and soy cream cheese
- Tofu egg salad in a pita pocket with lettuce
- [Mock chicken salad](#)



Solution #3: Stick 'em Up!

Liven up the fruit in your child's lunch by cutting various fruits into chunks and skewering them on large toothpicks: apples, grapes, strawberries, bananas, melons, etc... Pack them in plastic baggies to seal in freshness.

Warm lunches:

Heat these up in the morning and pack in a thermos.

- Leftovers
- Bean and veggie soup with toast fingers to dip in it
- Rice and beans, with shredded vegan cheese on the side to mix in
- Whole Wheat or Spinach Pasta and Marinara Sauce
- Frozen peas sautéed in a bit of olive oil and garlic powder
- Canned chickpeas sautéed in a bit of olive oil and cumin
- Canned chickpeas and tomatoes sautéed in olive oil and basil

Cold Meals:

- Cubes of marinated/baked tofu
- Ziti or multicolored finger food pasta with grated soy cheese and tomato sauce for dipping
- Chickpeas, green beans and macaroni (mixed together, no sauce)
- Veggie dog wrapped in biscuit dough and baked
- Baby potatoes and carrots, cooked whole, with tofu-based dip
- Falafel
- Baked white/sweet potato 'fries' with cubed veggie burger & organic ketchup to dip
- Taco salad - nachos with chopped tomatoes, guacamole, shredded vegan cheese and other toppings
- Quesadillas - vegan cheese with refried beans and whatever veggies are handy
- Pancake with fruit spread to dip
- French toast cut into bars with maple syrup, jam, or applesauce for dipping
- Cold pasta salad - use leftover vegetables, vary the shapes/colors of pasta and the salad dressings
- Brown rice or whole wheat couscous based salad
- Kidney or black bean salad

Snacks and Sides:

- Fresh fruit with dip (vegan cream cheese mixed with juice concentrate or preserves)
- Fruit salad
- Fruit cups
- Dried fruit
- Fruit leather
- Banana
- Raisins
- Applesauce
- Apple slices with peanut butter to dip



Solution #4: Pack a Pizza!

Place a flour tortilla in a nonstick skillet over low heat, spread it with tomato sauce, and sprinkle it with grated cheese, shredded meat, chopped vegetables and other fillings. Top it with another tortilla and cook it like a grilled cheese. When it cools, slice it like a pizza and pack it up.

- Apples, cut in half, cored and filled with peanut butter, make raisin eyes and pretzel legs, then wrap in plastic wrap, or a container
- Ants on a log - spread peanut/almond butter or vegan cream cheese in celery and top with raisins
- Carrots, celery and pita bread triangles with hummus for dipping
- Fresh veggies and hummus
- Celery and carrots with peanut butter to dip
- Broccoli with dip
- Baba ghanouj (roast eggplant purée) for dipping veggies
- Veggie/Fruity/Pirate's Booty
- Baked chips
- Peanut butter spread on whole wheat crackers
- Nuts
- Trail mix
- Granola bars
- Dry cereal or granola
- Soy yogurt
- Soy cheese cut in cubes



Solution #5: Smooth Move!

Kids love special treats in their lunches. Whip up a winner with fruits your kids love, a banana and some organic vanilla yogurt in a blender. Freeze the mixture in their thermos overnight. By lunchtime the next day, your kids will be thrilled to sip on a "milk shake!"

Drinks:

- Juice boxes
- Soymilk or rice milk boxes
- Bottled water
- Soy shakes
- Warm apple cider in a thermos
- Herb tea in a thermos
- Cocoa in a thermos

School Lunch Recipes and Tips

<http://vegkitchen.com/kid-friendly-recipes/school-lunch-recipes.htm#pasta>

Lunch Box Pasta Salad

Makes: 6 lunch box-size servings

Using small pasta shapes makes this pasta salad easy to pack into small containers or shallow thermoses. Feel free to substitute other vegetables that your kids might enjoy—such as green peas instead of broccoli. I like to make this the evening before I plan to send it for lunch. We serve some with dinner, then save enough to pack for lunch the next day.

- 2 cups uncooked rotelle (wagon wheels) or small shells
- 2 cups small broccoli florets
- 1 large carrot, sliced
- 1/2 cup pitted black olives, halved
- 1/2 cup cooked corn kernels or cut baby corn
- 1/3 to 1/2 cup natural low-fat dressing or your choice, as needed
- Salt to taste

Cook the pasta in plenty of rapidly simmering water, according to package directions. Just as the pasta becomes al dente, add the broccoli and carrot to the simmering water and allow to cook for another minute or two, just until the broccoli turns bright green.

Drain and rinse under cold running water until the mixture cools. Drain well and combine in a mixing bowl with the olives, corn, and dressing. Season to taste with salt.

If you make this the night before, taste and add more dressing if needed before packing into containers.



Solution #6: Pack a Dip!

Cleaning out your child's lunch box at the end of the day and finding uneaten fruits and veggies is an energy drainer. Take the stress out of clean-up by packing fun dips in leak-proof containers for those yummy carrot and apple slices: organic ranch dressing, organic peanut butter or organic vanilla yogurt are winners!

Soy Deli Heroes

Makes one sandwich

This is a good sandwich idea for hungry teens. The array of choices in the soy “deli” have helped expand vegetarian lunch options. This recipe is for one sandwich; increase the quantities as needed if you are making more than one.

- 6- to 7-inch hero roll
- Soy mayonnaise
- Mustard
- 2 to 3 soy deli slices, “Foney Baloney,” chicken or turkey-style slices, or Canadian “bacon,” cut in halves
- 1 slice American-style soy cheese or rice cheese, optional
- Very finely shredded lettuce
- Very thinly sliced firm plum tomato
- Dill pickle, optional

Split the hero roll lengthwise. Spread one half with soy mayonnaise, and the other with mustard. Line one half with the deli slices and the other with the cheese if it is being used (if not, line both halves with deli slices. Top one half with the lettuce and the other with the tomato slices. Put the halves together and wrap tightly with plastic wrap. Wrap up a pickle to go along with the sandwich if desired.

Salad Pitas

Makes one to two sandwiches

Kids who have learned to like salad will enjoy this fresh-tasting sandwich. Use your child’s favorite salad dressing for extra appeal. Increase quantities as needed for more sandwiches. Use the amounts given here as a guideline—there is no need to measure or to be exact.

- 1 medium firm ripe tomato, finely diced
- 1/4 cup (approximately) finely diced seeded cucumber and/or bell pepper
- Finely shredded lettuce, as needed
- Natural Thousand Island, French, ranch, or other dressing, as needed
- 1/4 cup (approximately) store-bought or homemade hummus
- 1 regular-size or 2 mini pita breads, warmed and cut in half

Combine the first two ingredients in a salad bowl. Add lettuce as desired and toss. Add enough dressing to moisten and toss again. Spread the inside of the pita with hummus, then fill with salad. Wrap first in foil, then in plastic bags.

Zucchini-Raisin Muffins

Makes one dozen

This is one of our favorite instead-of-a-sandwich muffins. Good accompaniments are a small container of yogurt or a wedge of cheese, plus some fresh fruit. If you won't be using the whole batch within a couple of days, pop some in the freezer for later use. make these simple muffins in the evening, and what a pleasure it is to know that you need only put them in the lunchbox in the morning, instead of making sandwiches!

- 1 1/2 cups whole wheat pastry flour
- 1/4 cup wheat germ
- 1/2 cup natural granulated sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 3/4 cup organic vanilla low-fat yogurt or soy yogurt
- 2 tablespoons light vegetable oil
- 1 cup firmly packed grated zucchini
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1/4 cup chopped walnuts, optional

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Combine the first 6 (dry) ingredients in a mixing bowl. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and pour in the yogurt and oil. Stir together until smoothly combined. Stir in the zucchini, raisins, and optional walnuts.

Divide the batter between 12 muffin tins and bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until the tops are golden and a small knife inserted in the center of a muffin tests clean. Cool on a rack. Wrap well in plastic wrap to send in a lunch box.



Solution #7: Shape it Up!

Pre-schoolers love to make learning fun. Use cookie cutters to cut off the crust of their sandwiches. This is a fun way to reinforce the objects and shapes they are learning in school and to encourage them to eat the nutritious foods provided for them.

Tacos

“Garden of Eatin” Tacos (hard or soft shell)

Lettuce

Tomato

Organic shredded cheese

Organic sour cream

Black Beans or Pinto Beans

Ground Chicken, turkey or organic beef

Prepare as directed. Wrap in foil for school lunch. Can be eaten cold.

More Lunch-Packing Tips:

- Freeze a PBJ sandwich or a juice box, and it will serve as an ice pack while it thaws in time for lunch.
- Let kids help pack lunch in the morning, so they pick things they'll eat!
- Keep a variety of small bottles of juices (apple, orange, tomato) to choose from.
- Be creative with different breads, bagels, wraps, pockets, and crackers for sandwiches.
- Pack a little note with their lunches to say "I love you and I'm thinking about you today!"
- Dedicate a cabinet in your kitchen to house all non-perishable foods & lunch packing supplies.
- Vary the types of bread used for sandwiches. Bagels, rolls, pita pockets, English muffins, raisin bread, and even fresh wheat flour tortillas or “wraps” can add interest to a sandwich.
- Be sure to check the [Recipes section](#) of VegFamily for other soups, salads, dressings and dips.

Final thoughts...

Preparing healthy lunches for your kids can be more colorful and interesting than the traditional school lunch fare. Involve your kids in the process and use this opportunity to teach them how to take good care of their bodies starting with the foods they choose to fuel their day. **Healthy kids are smart kids!**