I Need a Snack!
Recipes, Easy Lunches & More for the School Year
Back to School With a Twist

Healthy Choices for Lunch and Snacks

By Jill West

Back-to-school is a great transition time to start some new, healthy habits for the whole family. By improving snack choices and adding variety to school lunches, you can make a positive impact on your child’s school performance and overall nutrition. Here are four suggestions:

1. **Do a quick cupboard makeover.** Get rid of the high-sugar cereals, high-fat crackers, chips and cookies. Replace these snacks with low-sugar cereals, whole-grain crackers, nuts, low-fat popcorn, dried fruit and lower fat cookies.

2. **Add more fruit to the grocery list.** By purchasing more fruit – including fresh, frozen, dried, canned or fruit cups packed in water or juice – your child will have plenty of variety to prevent fruit boredom. Make sure the fruit will hold up in a lunch box or bag. There’s nothing worse than a mushy nectarine or warm grapes. Keep fruit cool and well protected by adding an ice pack and using containers that can endure being tossed around in a backpack.

3. **Schedule a family meeting.** Talk with your kids about the healthy changes the whole family will be making together. Change is hard, but by setting expectations and avoiding surprises, the transition goes more smoothly. I also encourage families to decide together what new snacks to try. When everyone is involved in choosing healthy options, it helps decrease the amount of complaining. Another strategy is to make healthy snack changes gradually. For example, start by eliminating chips and replacing them with fruit, popcorn and nuts. After a few weeks, add another change, such as buying low-sugar cereals to replace the high-sugar kind. With time, the healthy snack choices become “the norm” and unhealthy snacks become an occasional choice.

4. **Walk the walk.** Children mimic what their parents eat. So if parents choose healthy snacks, their kids are more likely to do the same. It’s also important for parents to show they enjoy eating healthy foods and are enthusiastic about trying new foods.

In addition to upgrading snack choices, add some back-to-school excitement by putting a twist on some traditional lunches.

- **Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich:** Instead of jelly, try naturally sweet sliced apples and raisins with any nut butter. The sweet crunch of the apple along with a burst of raisin makes for a sweet, yet nutritious bite.

- **Turkey Sandwich:** Skip the mayonnaise, substitute a whole wheat tortilla, pesto and add in some shredded carrots, broccoli slaw and red pepper along with sliced turkey or leftover chopped chicken for a significant sandwich upgrade.
■ **Tuna Sandwich**: Substitute plain Greek yogurt for the mayonnaise, which adds protein and calcium while decreasing fat. Next, mix in a hint of mustard, shredded carrots, diced celery and pickles. Spoon the tuna onto Triscuits or other whole grain crackers for a healthy, crunchy lunch.

■ **Salad**: If you have a child who likes salads for lunch or buys the school lunch salad but complains that the lettuce gets wilted, try using cabbage or broccoli slaw with a soy-sesame dressing or any favorite dressing. Packing the dressing in a separate container is ideal, but even if you add the dressing in the morning, these vegetables are heartier and stay firm longer. Top off the salad with diced leftover chicken, ham or tofu and some slivered almonds for a nutritious afternoon refueling.

■ **Pasta Salad**: Use leftover pasta, such as penne or rotelle, and combine with leftover diced chicken. Throw in some chopped celery and carrots, mix with Italian salad dressing and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. This can be made the night before and stored in a single-serving container. Add to the lunch box with an ice pack in the morning.

■ **Lunch on a Skewer**: Skip the sandwich bread by preparing kebabs. The combinations are endless, but some ideas to get you started include:

- mozzarella cheese balls, cherry tomatoes, melon cubes
- tofu cubes, grapes, cucumber chunks
- cheese cubes, apple chunks, celery
- cooked chicken, strawberries, red bell peppers

Sometimes a small twist on a traditional school lunch can make all the difference in its appeal.

Brainstorm additional ideas with your child to help them look forward to lunch for many months ahead.

Jill West, RDN, is a registered dietitian nutritionist and certified health coach with a private practice in Lafayette. She works with women, families and student athletes helping them make lasting changes that improve their health and performance. Jill is a professional speaker and author of the book *400 Moms*. To learn more, call 925-310-5545 or visit jillwestrd.com or 400moms.com.
When the kids arrive home hungry after school, it’s tempting – and easy – to break out the chips and cookies. But it doesn’t have to be hard to whip up an after-school snack that is both tasty and healthy. Oakland-based Revolution Foods, which provides healthy meals to schools, teamed up with 12-year-old kid chef Claire Hollingsworth, winner of the Food Network’s Chopped Junior, on these nutritious recipes that kids can make themselves or with an adult helper.

Tips for Kid Chefs

*Chopped Junior* champ Claire Hollingsworth offers the following tips for other kid chefs:

- **Experiment with flavor.** Try a bit of each spice in your pantry to see what it tastes like.
- **Mix and match!** Try new food pairings, like adding sliced fruit to a salad.
- **Get creative with your plate.** Make a rainbow with colorful veggies and fruit.
- **Use leftover pickle or olive juice as a substitute for lemon or lime juice.** It adds acid and salt.
- **Do flavor experiments with seasonings.** Try one at a time and then mix up your own. Always sprinkle in with fingers, don’t shake them in.
- **Missing an ingredient? Experiment with something similar.** Swap cumin for curry powder or broccoli for cauliflower.
- **Go beyond boring oils for cooking to add flavor.** Try olive, coconut, avocado or sesame oils for burst of flavor.
- **Experiment with vinegars and add zest to your meal!** Apple cider, rice and balsamic are flavor treasures waiting to be unwrapped.

**Supernova Hummus (Cauliflower Bean Hummus)**

**INGREDIENTS:**
- 3 cups of cauliflower chopped
- 1 15-oz. can cannellini beans
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1 clove garlic
- 3 teaspoons of olive oil

**COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:**
1. On a baking sheet, add chopped cauliflower with 1 teaspoon of olive oil.
2. Mix well with your hands and place in oven at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until soft.
3. Open and drain beans and place in your favorite blender.
4. Blend until well mixed together.

**CLAIRE’S EXPERIMENTATION TIP**
Use other acids like lime juice or pickle juice for fun. Try different beans like black beans or garbanzo beans. What do you have in your pantry that you might use instead?
**Bite-Sized Fiesta Bowls**

**INGREDIENTS:**
- 1 packet of taco seasoning
- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1 cup of water
- ½ green pepper chopped
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 whole tomato chopped
- ¼ cup chopped onions
- 1 tablespoon chopped cilantro
- 1 cup cheddar cheese
- ½ cup of sour cream (garnish)
- 1 bag of Tostitos Scoops or similar tortilla bowl

**COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:**
1. Preheat 1 teaspoon vegetable oil in a sauté pan over medium-high heat.
2. Add ground beef and sauté for about 5 minutes until cooked through.
3. Add peppers and taco seasoning pack and one cup of water into the pan and stir well.
4. Reduce heat to medium and cook until sauce thickens. Remove from heat.
5. In a small mixing bowl, add chopped tomatoes, onions and cilantro. Then pour in 1 tablespoon of lemon juice, plus salt and pepper to taste.
6. Assemble the Bite-Size Fiesta Bowls in the following order: Meat, tomato/onion/cilantro mix, sour cream and cheddar cheese. Now, time to eat!

**Bionic No Bake Oat Cake**

**INGREDIENTS:**
- ½ cup chocolate chips
- 1 cup oats
- 1 cup dried fruit
- 2 bananas mashed
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

**COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:**
1. Mash bananas, add seasonings and mix with spatula.
2. Add in dried fruit and oats.
3. Mix and roll into balls.
4. Serve plain or with a chocolate sauce drizzle.

**CLAIRE’S EXPERIMENTATION TIP**
Try different sticky things like almond butter or peanut butter instead of bananas. Try different flavors of chips instead of chocolate. Instead of chocolate, try various dried fruits. What’s in your pantry that you can use to experiment?
Do your kids arrive home from school ready for a major snack attack? It's easy to get into a rut with the same old items from the snack drawer. We've found with our own kids (and when we teach cooking classes) that snack time can be one of the best times to experiment. Branch out and try a new flavor or ingredient! These recipes are great options when you have even a few extra minutes to devote to snack time. They also make great mini cooking projects for a kitchen playdate.

**Easy, Easier, Easiest**

**A Trio of Tasty Afterschool Snacks**

By Stacie Dong and Simran Singh

Easy: Pan-Fried Dumplings

(About 16 dumplings)

Using store-bought dumpling wrappers and assembling the filling in advance simplifies things, turning this into a great half-hour cooking activity. Kids will love filling and folding dumplings, and mixing up a tasty dipping sauce, while you handle cooking at the stove. Send leftover dumplings in the next day's lunchbox.

**INGREDIENTS**

- ¼ pound uncooked ground pork, beef, chicken or turkey
- 4 ounces frozen chopped spinach
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons rice vinegar
- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- ½ teaspoon sesame oil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 16 store-bought dumpling wrappers (choose the thicker, round pot sticker wrappers over thin, square won ton wrappers)

**DIRECTIONS**

Thaw the frozen spinach and squeeze out as much water as possible. You should have about ¼ packed cup.

Mix the meat, spinach, soy sauce, rice vinegar, vegetable oil, sesame oil, salt and pepper, combining ingredients well. You can do steps 1 and 2 a day ahead and refrigerate the filling until you are ready to assemble the dumplings.

Place ½ tablespoon of the meat mixture in the center of each wrapper. Use a pastry brush or your fingers to brush the edges very lightly with water. Fold the wrapper in half and form half circle-shaped parcels. An additional step that helps the dumplings stay sealed is to make three pleats along the rounded, sealed edge of the dumpling. If little hands are not able to do this, you can omit it. An adult should make sure dumplings are well sealed.

Repeat until meat mixture is used up, placing finished dumplings on a lightly floured surface to prevent sticking.

Drizzle a small amount of oil in a large non-stick sauté pan. When pan is hot, add dumplings and fry for 2-3 minutes until the bottoms begin to crisp. Add ¼ cup of water to the pan (it will immediately begin to steam and sizzle). Turn down heat to medium, cover and cook for 6-7 minutes. (Lift the lid and check every minute or so; add several tablespoons of water if the pan is dry). To check for doneness, a digital thermometer inserted into the center of the dumpling should read at least 165° F.

Uncover the pan and turn up the heat to medium high and fry another 2-3 minutes until the bottoms are crisped and golden. Serve with dipping sauce.

**DIPPING SAUCE**

Mix all ingredients.

- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
Easier: Mango Lassi

(2 servings)

Most kids love smoothies, so why not enjoy a taste of India with a cool, refreshing mango lassi? A pinch of fragrant ground cardamom makes this drink special. It’s a great way to add a new flavor to your family’s spice repertoire.

We use the sweetened mango puree (labeled as “mango pulp”) that you can find at Indian grocery stores, but you can also use fresh or frozen mango chunks with a dash of honey or sugar as needed.

**INGREDIENTS**
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup pureed fresh or frozen mango (or more to taste)
- pinch salt
- big pinch ground cardamom
- 2-3 teaspoons of sugar or adjust to your taste (if using sweetened mango pulp, omit sugar)
- garnish with ground pistachios (optional)

**DIRECTIONS**

Combine all ingredients except sugar in blender. Pulse to mix well.

Taste and add sugar a teaspoon at a time, blending with each addition until you reach your preferred sweetness. If lassi is too thick, add additional milk to thin.

Easiest: “$4 Toast”

If you’re a food lover and live in the Bay Area, you’ve probably heard about the phenomenon of “$4 toast.” Fancy, artisan toast is definitely a “love it” or “leave it” thing, but duplicating this trendy snack at home is both easy and delicious. It’s a fun way to feature whole grains and guaranteed to keep even the busiest kids powered up for afternoon activities.

Start by buying an unsliced loaf of great quality, hearty, whole grain bread at your favorite bakery or market. The fresher the bread, the better the toast. Cut extra thick slices, about ¾-1-inch thick. Toast your bread so that it’s crisped on the outside but still moist and tender on the inside. Then, slather it with fabulous toppings such as:

- butter and a generous sprinkling of cinnamon sugar
- almond or peanut butter, a glossy drizzle of honey and a light sprinkle of flaky sea salt
- Nutella and flaky sea salt
- cream cheese, sea salt and a grinding of cracked pepper
- a drizzle of sweetened condensed milk and a sprinkle of toasted coconut

Stacie Dong and Simran Singh are San Francisco moms with a passion for cooking and exploring the world through food. On their blog, A Little Yumminess (alittleyum.com), they share recipes from around the world, favorite foodie destinations and ideas for raising adventurous eaters. They also teach classes, camps and private cooking workshops.