How to Prepare a Creative and Nutritious Lunch

Before the semester begins, take the time to create a list of several lunch box possibilities that your child would enjoy. Keep the list tucked nearby in a kitchen cabinet as a reference guide when packing lunches. Below are some ideas of great lunch box foods that toddlers and preschoolers would love to find tucked away in their lunch boxes.

 Cut-up pieces of fruit, cheese, marshmallow, and cereal served with skinny pretzel rods

 Small containers of chips, salsa, and guacamole

 Dried cereal

 Yogurt (you can add fruit and granola for a healthy dessert option)

 Make-your-own pizza kit with a small piece of pita bread, some tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese, diced pepperoni and fresh tomatoes

 Chunks of frozen melon, grapes or fresh peaches

 Frozen vegetables such as corn or sweet peas (they will thaw by lunch time)

 Deli meat and cheese rolled up together

 Tortilla topped with beans and cream cheese, either rolled or folded in half

 Crackers, cheese and deli meat cut into small circles or squares (*to resemble Lunchables found in grocery stores but make sure to add fruit and veggies to make lunch more balanced)*

 Easy-to-eat fruits such as blueberries, halved grapes, apple slices, Mandarin oranges

 Hummus and carrots and celery for dipping (*be sure to julienne carrots to prevent choking*)

Once a general list of lunch box possibilities has been created, contemplate how these food items can be jazzed up just a little to make lunch time a fun (*and healthy*) experience.

* Use cookie cutters to make shapes out of sandwiches, deli meat, or cheese
* Offer dips alongside fruits and veggies, such as ranch dressing, fat-free whipped cream, salsa, or whipped cream cheese
* Top fruit with a little bit of leftover sprinkles from a past birthday party
* Create mini-versions of typical foods, such as mini-muffins, mini-sandwiches, mini-fruit *(half of a banana, tiny apple slices)*

Although most parents try to stay clear of prepackaged food these days in an attempt to provide healthier food for their children, there are some prepackaged products that are healthy and easy to toss into a lunch box on a frantic morning. Such as:

 Fruit cups or bags of veggies

 Hummus cups

 100 calorie packs of crackers

 Granola bars

 100% Fruit leathers

 Beef jerky, pepperoni or lunch meat

To pack the healthiest lunch for your child, follow these guidelines:

* 1 portion starchy food (bread, pasta, rice, etc.)
* 1 portion dairy food (milk, cheese, yogurt, fortified rice or soymilk, etc.)
* 1 portion fruit (apple slices, orange wedges, apple sauce, etc.)
* 1 portion vegetables (carrot and/or celery sticks, cherry tomatoes, etc)
* 1 portion protein (meat, fish, tofu, etc.)

Read more on healthy lunches for kids:

<http://www.ehow.com/how_134910_healthy-lunches-kids.html#ixzz0sv8b3fY6>

<http://www.laptoplunches.com/ideas.html>

<http://nutrition.about.com/od/schoollunches/qt/lunchbox.htm>

<http://kidscooking.about.com/od/backtoschoolrecipes/qt/pack-school-lunch.htm>

<http://www.healthychild.com/healthy-school-lunches/healthy-school-lunch-ideas-for-kids/>

<http://www.mormonchic.com/recipe/recipebox/pages/healthysnacks.asp> (has a great food pyramid for young children)