



No longer in love with lunch? Ideas for making lunchboxes more interesting

Are lunchboxes coming back mostly uneaten? Are your children saying they are tired of the same things at lunch? Routines are important and helpful for families. Especially the daily grind to get everyone out the door with food for the day. But sometimes we need a break from routine. Try one or more of these ideas to add a little excitement to lunchboxes.

Be a detective. If lunches are coming back uneaten, ask questions to figure out why. What do children do during lunchtime? Are they running out of time? Did they have the utensils they needed? Could they open the packages? Are there things other children have that are interesting to your child? A small change may be an easy fix.

Presentation matters. A little change to how food is served may make a big difference in what children eat. Try serving foods in a slightly different way. Food on a stick is fun. Put cubes or small balls of cheese or other protein along with vegetables and fruits on a stick with rounded edges or unsalted pretzels. If it's not too much work, cut foods into different shapes. Are sandwiches usually in squares? Try triangles. Cookie cutters are great for unique shapes and can make food more interesting. Lunchboxes that have divided containers make it easy for children to see what they have. It also prompts adults to pack a variety of food – something different in each spot.

Pops of color. Did we mention presentation matters? Children are more interested in plates, or lunches, that have many colors. To liven up the white or brown of a sandwich and chips, add at least one fruit or veggie. They come in every color of the rainbow – red strawberries, oranges, yellow peppers, green cucumbers, blueberries, purple grapes. Children will love the colors. Parents love the bonus that each color provides special nutrients that help kids grow and stay healthy.

Switch it up. Add a new twist to the standard lunch. If sandwiches are the go-to, serve them on a different type of whole grain. Instead of bread, try whole-grain tortillas, pitas, or bagels. Or try adding a new type of lunch to the rotation. A snack lunch that has a variety of finger foods and dips can be fun. Think cheese and whole-grain crackers plus veggies with hummus or ranch dip and fruit. Or try breakfast for lunch.

Celebrate special events. Holidays and other special days can provide inspiration for a theme lunch. A Valentine's Day lunch could include red foods or things shaped like hearts. A St. Patrick's Day lunch could include green foods. Food can be fun on these special days. But you

could also add something extra. A festive napkin or piece of leftover Halloween candy may be a nice surprise.

Add a note. Children love to know you are thinking about them. Especially when you are apart. Add a handwritten note. You could write on a napkin, sticky note, or anything else you have in the house. *I love you. Hope you are having a great day. Good luck on your test!* Any short and sweet message may give them something to look forward to in the lunchbox. For children learning how to read, you could include a drawing or sticker.

Lunch no longer needs to be boring. There are small ways to add excitement without taxing money, time, or energy. Happy packing!

References

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