Healthier lunchbox checklist

Have you included…?

☑ a good portion of **starchy food,** e.g. thick wholemeal bread, chapatti, pitta pocket, pasta or rice salad?

☑ plenty of **fruit and vegetables,**
e.g. an apple, a satsuma, handful of cherry tomatoes or carrot sticks, mini-can of fruit chinks or small box of raisins?

☑ a portion of **milk or dairy food,**
e.g. individual cheese portion or pot of yogurt?

☑ a portion of **lean meat, fish or alternative,** e.g. ham, chicken, beef, tuna, egg, hummus or bean/lentil salad?

☑ a **drink,** e.g. fruit juice, milk or water.

Most importantly **enjoy your lunch!**

Can I get my children to eat more healthily?

- After all that feasting over the holiday period, aim to reduce the number of days your child's lunchbox contains a food high in fat and salt, such as crisps and salted savoury snacks. Why not try limiting the number of times they are included to twice a week?
- Try adding a bag of unsalted nuts*, plain popcorn, breadsticks or pretzels for a change. These are all healthier options as they are lower in fat and salt.
- Add a bag of dried fruit such as apricots or raisins. Not only do these count towards 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day, they also contain fibre. Your child may be surprised how good they taste.
- Add a piece of easy to eat fruit, such as pears, or a bunch of grapes, a small banana or clementine. (Young children sometimes find clementines tricky, so if you have time, peel it and wrap up before putting in the lunchbox.)
- Vegetables can add a crunch to any lunch, for example carrot sticks taste great on their own or with a tomato salsa dip.
- Add a lower fat snack such as a scone, slice of malt loaf or currant bun. These are all healthier alternatives to cakes and biscuits.
- Do not forget dairy foods – individual small pieces of cheese or cheese triangles, cheese and grapes on straws, fruit yogurts or flavoured milk drinks are important in the diet as they provide calcium.

What about foods high in fat, salt and sugar?

- Snacks can be part of a healthy lifestyle, but as with all foods, different snacks provide different nutrients so variety is the healthy way.
- Eating a balanced diet does not mean avoiding foods containing fat, salt and sugar completely, just ensuring that these foods are eaten occasionally and in smaller amounts. So do add a plain chocolate biscuit or puffed savoury snack to your child's lunch occasionally.
- Crisps, biscuits and chocolate can be eaten as part of a healthier lunchbox. Choose just one of these foods per day, rather than all three. Try to limit the number of times you provide these in a week.

Nominating one day a week as 'chocolate day' is one helpful way of getting a better balance. Only on this day of the week add a chocolate bar or chocolate biscuit to the lunchbox.

Salt and health

- Did you know approximately 75% of the salt we eat is from processed food, (including bread, meat, meat products, and savoury snacks). So it is important to check the salt content on the labels of the foods we eat, and also limit the amount of salt added in cooking or at the table.
- Recommended salt intakes for children, particularly very young children, is less than that of adults. Recommended salt intakes for children aged 4-6 years is 3g salt / day; children aged 7-10 years is 5g salt /day; older children have the same recommended intake as adults which is 6g salt / day.

The lunchbox salt check

- The main sources of salt in children's diets today are meat and meat products, savoury snacks, bread and cereal products.
- Some sandwich fillings are heavily salted such as smoked fish, cured meats and cheese, but they provide other important nutrients that are essential for children. Therefore, try not to have them everyday, but enjoy a good variety of foods.
- Sauces and pickles are great ways to liven up a sandwich – but to help control the amount of salt, use occasionally and spread thinly.

Add to the lunchbox this month

- Other ways of ensuring you are getting a good balance of nutrients are to include plenty of fruit and vegetables at lunchtime. Fruit and vegetables are naturally a good choice in terms of the nutrients they provide as well as being low in salt. Try to ensure that you include at least one portion.
- Bread manufacturers have begun to make reductions in the salt content of bread, ensuring that sandwiches are a good option for a healthier lunch.
- Lower salt crisps and unsalted nuts are good lower salt choices.
- Fruit is a naturally good choice, so ensure your child's lunch contains at least one portion.

Remember there are no good and bad foods; it is the overall balance of foods eaten in the diet that is important for good health. So eat a good variety and enjoy your lunch!