

Healthy School Lunch and Snack Solutions

AS PARENTS prepare for back to school season and in light of Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, September is a good time to focus on healthy school lunches and after-school snacks.

Here are a few ideas from child health advocate Merilee Kern:

- Lean meat, such as shaved ham or turkey, on whole grain bread or in a wheat wrap with some lettuce, low/fat-free cheese, and a touch of low/fat-free mayonnaise or mustard is sure to please—and nourish.
- The quintessential children’s sandwich, PB&J, can be made in a healthy way. Many peanut butter brands now offer low-fat and low-sodium versions. That—coupled with an all-fruit, sugar-free jelly on whole grain bread—makes this school cafeteria staple a guiltless pleasure.
- Tuna fish is packed with beneficial Omega-3 fatty acids. When mixed with low-fat mayonnaise, diced apple, and—if your child likes—a bit of onion and served in a wheat pita, it’s delicious and a healthy home run.
- BLTs can also be healthy! Simply swap regular bacon for turkey bacon and layer with lettuce, tomato, and fat-free mayonnaise. Sandwich in whole grain bread or roll into a pita wrap.
- What to serve on the side of the main school lunch item? Options abound! Low-salt pretzels; fat- and sugar-free yogurt or cottage cheese; celery sticks filled with low-fat/low-sodium peanut butter; any kind of pre-washed fresh fruit; dried or dehydrated fruit, such as raisins; apricots, pears, apples, roasted or raw almonds, walnuts or peanuts (not oiled or candied); low-fat string cheese or chunked low-fat cheese; and baked chips or healthy pita chips are all great choices.



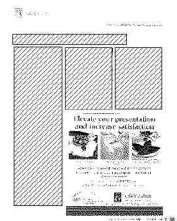
- Skip the sugary juice box and send along a bottle of water instead to get your child in the habit of working toward his/her optimal fluid intake (experts recommend one consume about .5 ounces of water per pound of body weight).

After school is prime time for snacking. Kern offers these waistline-friendly snack alternatives your kids are sure to love:

- **Potato Chips/Fries:** Cut the potato in the desired shape (round, rectangular, oblong, etc.). Fully coat with egg whites. Season with a touch of salt or other herbs as desired. Bake at 350 degrees until golden brown. Serve with sugar-free catsup.
- **Popcorn:** Air pop popcorn and drizzle with a moderate amount of powdered butter substitute, light parmesan cheese, or even honey for a tasty twist.

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- **Pizza:** On a fat-free/low-calorie/low-carb whole grain tortilla (or whole grain bagel), smear tomato paste or sauce and top with fat-free cheese, whatever veggies the child likes, and lean meats like ham or turkey. Bake at 350 degrees until cheese is melted.





- **Tortilla Chips:** Cut Chinese wonton squares (usually found in the produce aisle) in half diagonally so they become triangles. Spread out evenly on a baking sheet, lightly spray with cooking spray, and sprinkle on a dash of salt. Bake at 350 degrees until crunchy. Eat alone or serve with fat-free salsa or the Mexican bean dip described below.
- **Mexican Bean Dip:** Drain and food process two 14-ounce cans of black beans. Add 3/4 cup of fat-free salsa and 1/2 tablespoon of Worcestershire sauce and blend until completely smooth. Top with a dab of fat-free sour cream, fat-free cheese, diced tomatoes, chopped green onions, etc. as desired.
- **Fruit Smoothies:** Simply blend, in amounts to your personal liking, either plain or flavored fat-free/sugar-free yogurt with skim milk, ice cubes, and either fresh or frozen fruit chunks. For added sweetness, add a touch of honey or an artificial sweetener, such as stevia. Blend and enjoy!



- **Healthy Ice Cream Sandwiches:** These are a snap—and always a crowd pleaser. Purchase any type of round fat-free/sugar-free cookie on the market (preferably the new whole grain varieties) or bake any low-fat/low-calorie cookie recipe from scratch. Sandwich sherbet, sorbet, or gelato between two cookies and press to make a sandwich. For added excitement and flavor, roll the outside edge of the “sandwich” in chopped unsalted nuts, shredded coconut, raisins, or finely diced fresh or dried fruit.
- **Parfait:** In a cup or bowl, create thin, alternating layers of non-fat yogurt, low-fat granola (or another heart-healthy cereal product), and fruit slices or whole berries. Make as many layers of each as you like and then dig in!
- **Jell-O®:** Let’s not forget how much colorful, jiggly Jell-O® can delight, especially when it is jam-packed with diced fruit. **E**



Children’s health advocate and fitness champion Merilee Kern is creator of the Kids Making Healthy Choices app for children, parents, and educators, which is based on her award-winning children’s book.