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Happy 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Barney!

# Lunch Boxes 2 ♥

KIWI brings you the basics of **healthy** lunches, plus a handy planning tool.

by *Kirsten Henri*



Photography by James Ransom  
Food Styling by Janine Kalesis

**N**ot so long ago, a typical lunch box packed by Mom meant a slice of bologna sandwiched between two squares of squishy white bread, a chocolate-chip cookie and a carton of whole milk. We're sure Mom packed that lunch with a whole lot of love, but it definitely wasn't packed with a whole lot of nutrition!

Today's parents know that kids need a range of nutrients to help them grow, but you may be overwhelmed by the specifics. What should you always put in your child's lunch box and what should you always leave out? Are they getting too much protein or not enough? What if your child won't eat anything but chicken nuggets?

KIWI has got you covered. We have expert advice, and we've updated our popular healthy lunch-planning grid from last year with new suggestions and recipes. Read on for solutions to lunch box dilemmas and tips for healthy midday meals.

## **Building Blocks: What Makes a Lunch Healthy?**

Whole grains, fruits and vegetables (preferably one of each), calcium and lean protein are the components of a healthy lunch. As long as each group is represented in your child's lunch box, there's a nutritive benefit.

You may be thinking it's easier said than done. Should there be more grains than protein? What are the best options in each category? The USDA recommends the following amounts for kids daily:

**Six ounces of grains.** The USDA suggests that at least half of the daily intake of grains be whole grains, but 100% is better. Whole grains contain fiber and vitamins that refined grains do not. Choose whole grain products when buying breads, tortillas, pastas and cereal. Also try serving brown rice, quinoa, whole barley, bulgur or buckwheat.

**Two-and-a-half cups of vegetables and one-and-a-half cups of fruit.** Ideally, your selections should be fresh and varied, since different fruits and vegetables offer different vitamins and nutrients. Include fruits and vegetables in a variety of colors, and buy what's in season: apples in autumn, oranges in winter. Shop at local farmers markets or join a community supported agriculture (CSA) co-op that arranges regular food deliveries from a local farm. And try to make your produce organic whenever possible.

**Three cups of milk (two cups for children two to eight years old) or an equivalent calcium source.** Sources include lowfat milk and cheese, yogurt, non-genetically modified (non-GMO) calcium-fortified soy and dark, leafy greens.

**Five ounces of lean protein.** Use lean varieties of turkey, chicken and ham. Fatty fish such as fresh salmon and tuna are packed with healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Low-mercury canned tuna and antibiotic and hormone-free meats, both great choices, are sold in many supermarkets, even as store brands (such as ShopRite's Reddington Farms label). Protein doesn't have to come from an animal source—legumes, non-GMO tofu and tempeh are all delicious alternatives.

Note that other food groups should be consumed in greater quantities than protein. "Healthy meals in general should focus on fruits, vegetables and grains," says Mary Ellen Renna, MD, a board-certified pediatrician, nutritionist and author of *Growing Up Healthy the Next Generation Way*.

## Preparation + Picky Eater Tips

**1 Include kids in lunch prep.** "Kids are more likely to eat something if they're involved in making it. Starting at age three, kids can help pick out a piece of fruit," says Jennifer Bevilacqua, nutritionist.

**2 Limit choices.** Don't ask your kids what they want for lunch—give them two or three healthy options to choose from. "If you stock your pantry with good foods only, then you can present just these choices to your child," says Renna.

**3 Utilize hungry moments.** "Take advantage of these times to introduce new foods," says Bevilacqua. Offer new foods in very small amounts along with familiar foods.

**4 Make trying mandatory.** Make it a rule that your kids at least sample new foods. Janice Newell Bissex, of the Meal Makeover Moms, also asks her daughter to explain why she did or didn't like a certain dish.

**5 Educate them.** Renna stresses the importance of letting kids know the benefits of each food. Tell them that calcium will help them grow strong bones, for example.

**6 Looking good, feeling good.** Presentation is a key part of eating. "How you package it is really important," say the Meal Makeover Moms. "It has to look fresh and smell good. Avoid the soggy factor. Kids love little portions, things cut into shapes, cute containers and dipping. A kid will never eat fruit that's turned brown. You can avoid this by tossing apple slices with a little lemon juice."

“We should think of meats and proteins more as a condiment. Kids really do get plenty of protein—and adults even more so.”

Liz Weiss and Janice Newell Bissex, registered dietitians, professional chefs and authors also known as the Meal Makeover Moms, agree: “Kids don’t need a dagwood sandwich. We’d put less than one ounce of lean protein on a sandwich for kids.”

### What’s In, What’s Out?

What should you look for at the grocery store? Try to stick with unprocessed foods, which will keep kids healthy and properly fueled for a full day of school. Jennifer Bevilacqua, a nutritionist who helps families overhaul their kitchens for healthier eating, recommends steering clear of products that contain more than seven ingredients. “After that, you get into the danger zone, with lots of fillers, additives and artificial dyes,” she says. “Parents often don’t have a lot of time to read labels thoroughly, but a good rule of thumb is if a label has unpronounceable ingredients or if an ingredient looks like it would be on your shampoo bottle, avoid it.”

#### ► The Good

If you follow these guidelines when food shopping, you’ll be on the right track to packing healthy lunches.

- ♦ Try to buy as many organic and all natural foods as possible.
- ♦ For bread and grain products, look for whole grains, whole wheat and flour that hasn’t been enriched or bleached.
- ♦ Buy pesticide-free fruits and vegetables, and look for dried fruits labeled “unsulphured” and “unsweetened.”
- ♦ For all dairy products, the best options are lowfat and organic.
- ♦ In the protein category, choose nitrite-, antibiotic- and hormone-free lunchmeats, low-mercury tuna and soy products that haven’t been genetically modified.
- ♦ Stick with sunflower or olive oil for dressings or cooking, and remember that plain lowfat yogurt can often be used as a substitute for mayonnaise.

#### ► The Bad

Just as important as what goes into a healthy lunch box is what doesn’t. Here are the ingredients to avoid.

- ♦ High-fructose corn syrup
- ♦ Partially hydrogenated oils
- ♦ Trans fats
- ♦ Sodium nitrite and sodium nitrate (chemical additives often used in lunch meats that become a carcinogen in our bodies—labels should say “uncured” and “no nitrites” or “no nitrites added”)
- ♦ Artificial sweeteners (often found in products marked “light” or “sugar-free,” or you may see aspartame, Splenda, sucralose or saccharin in the ingredients list)
- ♦ Antibiotics and hormones (found in animal products like milk and meats—look for “antibiotic-free,” “hormone-free” and “no rGBH”)

Additionally, you may want to reconsider packing peanuts and tree nuts because of the growing number of children with allergies

to both. Check your school’s policies on these foods to make sure the lunch you pack doesn’t harm another child. Think about switching to soy-nut butter or SunButter, which is made with sunflower seeds.

Many lunch boxes also stray in the beverage department. Sodas and fruit drinks (which are often disguised as fruit juices) only offer excess sugar and empty calories. Plain water, lowfat milk and 100% fruit juice (with no sweeteners) are better choices.

### I Know He Should Eat Healthy, But He Doesn’t Agree!

You want that lunch box chock-full of nutritious food, but he’s determined to not allow a vegetable or a whole grain to interfere with his steady diet of chicken nuggets. You’re not alone: “Nearly every family I’ve worked with has had challenges in this area,” says Bevilacqua.

How do you handle a picky eater? “Don’t worry,” says Renna. “No child will starve himself if he has access to food. Changing their diet is a slow maneuver. You can’t shock them with it all at once.”

The ideal approach is to teach your kids healthy eating habits from birth, but if you’re just starting to introduce them to healthy foods, all our experts stress the importance of setting a good example with your own eating habits. “Parents need to be honest with themselves about where picky eating comes from,” says Bevilacqua. “With my clients, often one of the parents is a picky eater, and the children will replicate that parent’s behavior. There are always going to be foods people don’t like, but it’s really a behavior issue—it’s about controlling. Parents have to remember that kids need guidance and are looking to them for it.”

It’s imperative that everyone in the household get with the healthy eating program. Start small and slowly, eliminating just one junk food item at a time. Dr. Renna recommends starting with soda: “You’ll hear whining, no question about it, but stick to your guns. Parents have to remember that they supply the food choices. Phase them in, piece by piece.” After soda, you can move on to replacing white bread with whole grain bread, and sweets with fruit. This approach takes “two to three weeks, max,” says Renna. “But it always works. Always!”

### Keep it Cool (or Hot!)



**Big gulps.** Sigg Bottles are reusable and made from durable aluminum. (\$15.99-\$17.99, [www.mysigg.com](http://www.mysigg.com))



**Contain it.** Stainless steel lined food jars keep contents warm. Check out options from Thermos (left) and Target (center). The Thermos Foogo (right) holds beverages. ([www.thermos.com](http://www.thermos.com) and [www.target.com](http://www.target.com))

# Meal-Planning Chart

Remember when mixing and matching that the four building blocks of a lunch are whole grains, protein, fruits and vegetables and calcium. DRINKS: Choose from 4–6 oz. of 100% fruit juice (4–6 oz. for one to six years; 8–12 oz. for seven to 19 years), lowfat organic milk, soy milk, flavored water or fruit juice mixed with water.

MAIN DISH	FRUITS/VEGGIES	ADDITIONAL SIDE	SNACK
<b>Ham &amp; Cheese Pinwheels</b> See page 64 for recipe.	spinach dip and pita chips	squeezable yogurt	Medjool dates, halved and filled with nut butter or cream cheese
<b>Turkey or Veggie Bacon LTs</b> See “BLT Makeover” recipe on page 64	sliced veggies or pita chips and fresh salsa 	baked apple slices with cinnamon	whole grain snack bar 
<b>Whole Wheat Pasta Salad</b> See “Kitchen Sink Pasta Salad” recipe on page 64	sliced apple or pear and yogurt dip	kid’s cheese board: 2 oz. cheese, crackers, dried fruit	edamame 
<b>Lean Turkey or Veggie Chili</b> See “Halftime Taco Chili” recipe on page 64	hummus and sliced veggies	baked sweet potato fries (cold)	peanut butter balls* 
<b>Beans and Rice Bowl*</b>	julienne salad*	string cheese	almond-quinoa muffin*
<b>Inside-Out Turkey Sandwich*</b>	applesauce 	drinkable yogurt or kefir	graham crackers
<b>Crunchy Homemade Chicken Nuggets*</b>	crispy snap peas and crunchy green beans and herbed yogurt or honey mustard dip	omega-3 egg (hard-boiled or deviled) 	low-sugar granola
<b>Mac ‘n’ Cheese Shells with Peas</b> 	sliced seasonal fruit 	bean dip and baked corn chips	2 organic cookies (or snack-bag size) 
<b>Vegetable Pasta Soup*</b>	½ cup tuna and crackers	pudding	fruit leather or bar
<b>Veggie &amp; Cheese Frittata*</b>	cherry or grape tomatoes (sliced) and mozzarella 	fruit and yogurt shake*	soy or rice chips

\*see “Lunch Bunch Bowl,” “A-Plus Alphabet Soup” and other recipes available on [kiwimagonline.com/recipes/](http://kiwimagonline.com/recipes/)

#### Vegetarian/Allergy/Gluten Resources

Visit [www.veganlunchbox.com](http://www.veganlunchbox.com), [www.kidswithfoodallergies.org](http://www.kidswithfoodallergies.org), [www.foodallergygourmet.com](http://www.foodallergygourmet.com) and [www.foodallergykitchen.com](http://www.foodallergykitchen.com) for more tips and recipes.

**Reminders:** Try to buy lowfat organic dairy, organic fruits and veggies, nitrite-free meat, low-mercury tuna, whole grains and snacks without sugar substitutes or high-fructose corn syrup.



## But Which One?

We often hear from our readers that they want to know which brands to pick. Not all foods are created equal. For example, yogurt is a healthy food, but not if you buy a variety that contains high-fructose corn syrup, aspartame or artificial colorings. We're label readers at KIWI and have navigated the aisles and labels to find the best items for your kids. Here are some of our favorites. Visit [www.kiwimagonline.com](http://www.kiwimagonline.com) for a shopping list of these and more lunch box foods.

### BEVERAGES\*

- flavored water:** Wateroots  
**soymilk:** Silk, Edensoy, Zensoy, Soy Dream  
**milk:** Horizon Organic, Organic Valley, Natural by Nature  
**juice:** Apple & Eve, Kagome (fruit and veggie mix), R.W. Knudsen, Whole Kids, Back to Nature, Honest Tea

\*most available in single-serve containers

### SNACKS

- yogurt:** Stonyfield Farm, Horizon Organic, Lifeway Probugs, Whole Soy, Wallaby  
**smoothies:** Stonyfield Farm, Bolthouse Farms, Horizon Organic  
**chips:** Stacy's, Snyder's of Hanover, Glenny's, 365 Foods, Good Health, Genisoy, Lundberg, Snack Factory  
**crackers:** Wasa, Kashi, Sesmark  
**cookies:** Back to Nature, Mi-Del, Newman's Own, Immaculate Baking Co., Healthy Handfuls, Annie's Homegrown  
**whole grain or granola bars:** Odwalla, Cascadian Farm, Kashi, Clif Kid, EnviroKidz, Larabar, Barbara's Bakery  
**fruit snacks:** FruitaBü, Clif, Tropicana FruitWise, O Organic Raisins, Amazin' Raisins  
**cereals:** Back to Nature, Nature's Path, Bare Naked, Kashi, Mother's  
**applesauce:** Santa Cruz, Mott's Organics, Eden Organic  
**pudding:** Lifeway, Zensoy, Kozy Shack  
**allergy-free:** Enjoy Life, Pamela's

### MAIN DISH

- deli slices:** Applegate Farms, Hormel Natural Choice, Organic Valley, Lightlife (GMO-free soy)  
**tuna:** Wild Planet, Henry & Lisa's Natural Seafood  
**mac 'n' cheese:** Back to Nature, Annie's Homegrown  
**bread:** Rudy's Organic, Wild Oats, Ezekiel

## Lunch Box to Box Lunch ▶

Companies like Brown Bag Naturals ([www.brownbagnaturals.com](http://www.brownbagnaturals.com)), in Southern California, and Kid Chow ([www.kidchow.com](http://www.kidchow.com)), in Northern California, offer parents an alternative to the school cafeteria or packing a lunch themselves: a healthy lunch ordered online in advance and delivered directly to the child's school. On the east coast, Kidfresh provides meals for New York City. ([www.kidfresh.com](http://www.kidfresh.com))

## Luggable Lunches

Ditch brown sacks and plastic baggies for these reusable options.



**Tiny totes.** Adorable and portable, Mimi the Sardine offers their eco-coated cotton Lunchbugs in a variety of patterns. (\$21.95, [www.mimithesardine.com](http://www.mimithesardine.com))



**Fresh look.** The lunch box system by Fit & Fresh has 3 compartments with a cool pack layer. (\$9.99, [www.fit-fresh.com](http://www.fit-fresh.com))



**Lunch-a-leaping.** Cool Totes lunch bag, delightfully decorated with frogs, is lead free. (\$23.95, [www.reusablebags.com](http://www.reusablebags.com))



**It's a wrap.** Wrap-N-Mat performs double lunch duty as a sandwich bag and a placemat. (\$6.50, [www.wrap-n-mat.com](http://www.wrap-n-mat.com))



**Lap it up.** This innovative box by Laptop Lunches is ideal for the perfectly portioned meal. (\$34.99, [www.laptoplunches.com](http://www.laptoplunches.com))