

## PUT SOME LOVE INTO THAT LUNCHBOX

It's back to school and once again parents are faced with the dilemma of what to pack for lunch.

A healthy lunchbox should help to improve your child's attention, behaviour and learning throughout the day and into the afternoon.

The key is to try make lunchboxes fun and easy to eat; children will often leave food that takes a lot of effort to eat, is unattractive or soggy. They want a quick 'pit stop' so that they can refuel and still have as much time as possible on the playground.

Firstly, it's important to know the basics:

- Start off with a starch base (whole wheat bread, whole wheat rolls, whole wheat pita, pasta/noodles, wraps, etc.)
- Include a source of protein (lean cold meats, chicken, peanut butter, beans, lentils, tuna, sardines, pilchards, cheese, egg, etc.)
- Garnish with some salads (lettuce, cucumber, tomato, onions, carrots, etc.)
- A sauce or topping (such as low fat mayonnaise or salad dressing) is optional but not essential and remember that if you choose to use a topping, don't use margarine as well as this increases the overall fat content
- Add a fruit (any fruit either fresh or dried)
- Don't forget the liquids (water, diluted pure fruit juice, low fat milk)

Now that you know what makes up a lunchbox, here are some ideas to help you put it all together:

- Tasty low fat cheese, pineapple (drain and pat dry with kitchen paper) and lettuce on whole wheat bread
- Avocado, (squeeze some lemon juice over to stop it from turning brown), chicken and coriander on seed loaf
- Chopped lettuce, peppers (green, yellow and red) and cucumber, grated carrots, mozzarella (grated) and chickpeas. Toss all together in a bowl and fill small whole wheat pitas.
- Mashed boiled egg, curry or barbeque spice, 1 teaspoon low fat mayonnaise and lettuce on whole wheat bread
- Homemade hamburger made with lean mince, lettuce, tomato and gherkin on a whole wheat bun
- Provita biscuits with low fat cheese wedges
- Drained tin of tuna, boiled whole wheat noodles, small onion (finely chopped), peppers (green, red, yellow), cucumber (small cubes), tomato (small cubes), cubed avocado and low fat mayo mixed with tomato sauce and spices. Mixed together this makes a great summer salad.
- Cooked and cooled brown rice, chopped tomato, onion, spring onion, garlic, cucumber, avocado chunks (with squeezed lemon to prevent discolouration), sunflower seeds, and diced mozzarella, toss together and use as is or as a filling in a whole wheat pita.

Certain toppings such as salami, polony, liver spread and combined bacon and egg should be avoided as they have a high saturated fat and cholesterol content. You should also bear in mind that commercially available muffins tend to be high in fat and added sugar so a homemade banana or bran muffin with cheese could be a healthy lunchbox snack now and then.

Occasional treats could include:

- Nuts with or without the raisins
- Liquorices
- Jelly babies or beans
- Marshmallows
- Biltong
- Banana loaf

- Carrot cupcakes
- Home made oat biscuits or crunchies

Lunchboxes are often not the only place where children get food: parents should be mindful of the amount of money they give their children to spend at the school tuck-shop. Childhood obesity is a growing problem in South Africa with 17% of children aged 1-9years old being overweight.

It is for this reason that the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA (HSFSA) has launched a tuck-shop programme. It is a free service and the HSFSA commits to:

- Provide the school with assistance, advice and guidance as to how to make the tuck shop healthier,
- Provide training to tuck shop staff, and
- Provide a monthly newsletter via e-mail which would contain a health article and other useful tips.

For more information or to make use of this service kindly contact Melissa Zwart (Registered Dietician) at the Heart and Stroke Foundation on 021 447 4222 or e-mail: [eduheart@heartfoundation.co.za](mailto:eduheart@heartfoundation.co.za)

**Written by Melissa Zwart, Dietician, at the Heart and Stroke Foundation SA.**