

# Brown-Bagging it:

## Great Ideas for Noontime Meals

What's your usual lunchtime fare? If it's a deli sandwich on the run or a burger that you gobble in your car, you're not alone. Millions of us hit fast-food joints and convenience stores in search of fast, satisfying lunches. The problem is that these meals are often high in calories and fat and can be expensive as well.

If you want to eat more healthfully, or want your kids to consume more nutritious lunches, consider "brown-bagging" it. If you plan ahead, any lunch can be much more tempting than a simple sandwich, some chips and a cookie or two. Read on for a selection of nutritious, simple lunch ideas you and your kids are bound to enjoy.

It may take a little extra time in the morning, but there are several smart reasons to make your own lunch, says registered dietitian and American Dietetic Association spokesperson Joan Carter. "You can bring foods that you like, you can control the portion size and you know what you're eating," says Carter. "When you bring your lunch, you have something to eat so you don't end up starving yourself and then at lunchtime, going to the candy machine and having M&Ms."

Carter suggests thinking creatively when it comes to deciding what to pack. "Some people can eat the same turkey sandwich every day, but for most of us, having a variety works better," she says. To keep from getting bored with the same kinds of sandwiches, experiment with different types of breads, meats, and cheeses.

### FOR EXAMPLE:

- Replace your usual ham and Swiss on rye with thinly sliced roast beef on pumpernickel bread with some spicy mustard. Or, see if your kids enjoy a peanut butter and bacon sandwich on whole wheat bread.
- Make tortilla wraps by spreading a thin layer of cream cheese on a flour tortilla and adding ham, cheese or turkey, and vegetables like green and red peppers, onions, broccoli, cucumbers and tomatoes. (Kids and adults love them!) Or wrap grilled chicken and vegetables, pesto sauce and a little low-fat mayonnaise in a tortilla. It's just as delicious as the popular fast food variety and better for you, too.

- Packaged soups. Check out Campbell's "Soups to Go" or if your kids have access to a microwave at school, look for the prepackaged soups that come in cardboard cartons; you add boiling water and they're ready to eat in minutes. They're delicious, low-fat and offer a variety of flavors ranging from corn chowder to black bean chili to tomato vegetable.

- Prepackaged salads. You can pick these up in the produce section of your grocery store; they make it easy to boost your veggie quotient for the day. Pair a salad with soup and add some whole-grain crackers and fruit – you've got a well-balanced meal.

- Mix up your vegetable and fruit choices, too. Who wants to eat an apple every single day? Grapes, bananas, plums, and pears are all great portable fruit choices or look for the portable tins of pre-cut fruit. If your kids are bored with carrot sticks, try colorful sliced peppers with low-fat dip, or load up a sandwich with veggies – they're more likely to eat them.

The key to healthy lunches is planning in advance for both you and your kids. That's why you should keep some nonperishable items on hand at work. They'll ensure that you don't have to run out for fast-food or succumb to the office vending machines when you don't have time to make a lunch in the morning.

"Keeping things like packaged soups in your desk drawer makes a lot of sense because there are going to be a lot of times when you can't get away for lunch," says Carter. "Besides, when you eat out, you have no control over your portion size and it depends on your willpower to not eat the whole thing. It's certainly a lot less expensive to 'eat out of your drawer' instead."

Whether you choose a simple sandwich, leftovers from last night's dinner, or something more offbeat, bringing your lunch from home can save you money, save you time and help you eat more healthfully. Experiment with different selections and food choices, and you may find that the noontime meal becomes your favorite!

*Kelly James-Enger*



## 7. Julienne

Slice vegetables into thin sticks, known as julienne. Add them to the salad as a topper and call them salad french fries.

## 8. Fruit Salad

A fruit salad is a great alternative for kids who simply won't eat a green salad. Mix up whatever fresh fruits you have on hand. Buy cans of various fruits so you will always have a variety available even when the fresh fruit supply dwindles.

## 9. Jazz It Up With Fruit

Add some fruit to a green salad. Oranges, strawberries, blueberries and other colorful fruits work best. Melon balls are a great addition and some grated coconut is a fun surprise. Slices of kiwi, mango or other exotic fruits will also make a salad more exciting.

## 10. Dip Into It

If there is a dip your kids enjoy, use it as salad dressing. Try a strawberry yogurt fruit dip, french onion dip or experiment with flavored yogurt, maybe even cottage cheese. Some kids enjoy sweet and sour sauce used sparingly as a dressing. Or, maybe present the dip on the side and let them dip their salad into it.

## 11. Creative Cutting

Experiment with the way you cut fresh vegetables when adding them to salads. Try waffle cut, wafer cut and fun shapes such as circles, zig-zags and curly-qs.

## 12. Meaty Additions

Pepperoni, julienne salami, diced ham and pieces of leftover chicken or turkey are great additions to salads. Hard boiled eggs are sure to be winners as well. Add real pieces of bacon and present it as a BLT salad.

## 13. Stuff It

Disguise a salad as a sandwich. Fill a pita with a chicken and veggie salad or roll a tortilla around a tomato and cheese salad.

## 14. Disguise It.

Use salad as a backdrop. Place greens and cut vegetables under a scoop of cottage cheese, tuna or chicken.

## 15. Great Grains

A cold salad using pasta, tabouleh or couscous can incorporate many chopped or diced vegetables, while masquerading as a pasta or grain dish. Experiment with different pasta shapes, flavors and colors.

## 16. Sweeten It Up

Add a few raisins, mini marshmallows or even chocolate chips to salads to interest kids.

## 17. Scrap the Lettuce

There are some kids who just won't eat lettuce no matter what you add to it, so make salads without it. A mixture of sliced cucumbers, grated carrots and some sunflower seeds is a healthy salad. Try other greens such as fresh spinach, field greens or even dandelion greens.

## 18. Salad Bar

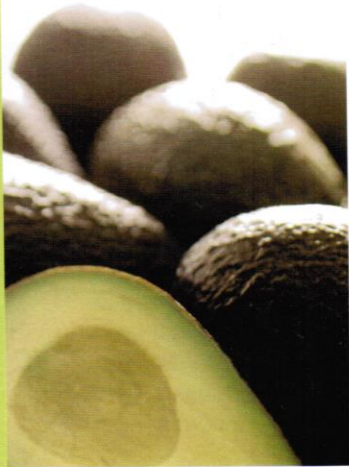
Instead of combining all the ingredients for a salad together, serve them in individual bowls and allow your family to mix their own salads.

## 19. Bread It

Croutons are a popular addition to salads. You can build on this by making bread salads. Rip up some bread and add it to the salad. Try toasting the bread first or using different types of bread such as pumpernickel or rye and using leftover garlic bread. Goldfish crackers or small pretzels are a great crunchy addition, too. Bread bowls are available in many grocery stores and are a fun way to serve a salad as well.

## 20. Salad Kebabs

Make salads on skewers using a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, adding in a few bonuses such as marshmallows or chunks of cheese.



# salad secrets:

## 20 Ways to Help Kids Enjoy Salads

*McWhorter Sember*

Many kids put salads in the same category as dental visits and cooked spinach – good for you, but to be avoided whenever possible. But, with a little creativity, salads can be so much more than bowls full of green stuff. Colorful ingredients, artistic arrangements and fun and flavorful additions will make kids ask for salads. Try some of these tips to make salads a fun part of your family meals.



### 1. Change Your Attitude

If you present salad as something you know your kids won't like, they'll agree with you. If you introduce salad as something yummy and fun, your kids will feel the same way. Show some enthusiasm about salad and your kids will be more interested.

### 2. Involve Your Kids

Have your kids help you make salads, beginning in the produce section of the grocery store. Ask them to select fruits and vegetables they would like to try. Try allowing each child to select one new item per week. Then ask them to assist in the preparation. Kids are more likely to eat foods they helped to prepare. Let them be creative in how they cut or arrange the foods and let them try adding different things to the salads as well.



### 3. Relax Your Rules

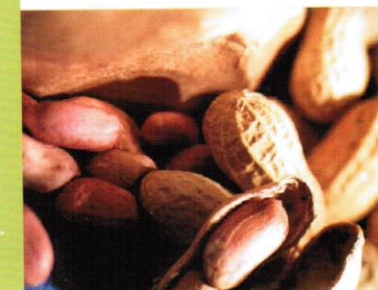
A salad does not have to be a mound of lettuce in a bowl with dressing on it. A salad can be any combination of fresh fruits and/or vegetables. Experiment a little and see what works for your family.

### 4. Be Artistic

Use your ingredients to make faces, designs, animals and any other food sculpture you can think of. Your kids will be happier to eat food that looks appealing. Ask them for special requests and try to construct their ideas with salad.

### 5. Go Nuts

Sprinkle sunflower seeds, pecans, walnuts, peanuts, cashews or other nuts over a salad to entice picky eaters.



### 6. Cheese Ease

Cubes or shreds of cheese added to a salad make it more attractive to kids. If all else fails, try letting kids squirt a small amount of Cheese Whiz® on the salad.