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Healthy Brown Bag Lunches

With school starting up again, many people are back to helping their kids pack their lunch each morning. It is difficult to come up with new ideas throughout the year that kids like, can be packed relatively easy and isn't straight off the candy shelf. So how do you pack a healthy meal that your children will still want to eat several hours later and isn't the standby peanut butter sandwich everyday?

Here are some ideas:

- ▶ Take your kids with to the grocery store to help pick out foods to pack. Kids that help pack their lunches are more likely to eat their lunches.
- ▶ Include occasional treats like a cookie, bite-sized candy bar or rice Krispy bar.
- ▶ Arm yourself with the right tools. Get containers of various sizes that won't leak. Find a good insulated lunch bag and thermos so you can pack hot foods to give lunch more variety. Hint...have your child practice opening and closing the containers before they leave for school the first day.
- ▶ Plan for leftovers at mealtime. Either freeze the leftover stew in single-serving freezer containers for later or refrigerate so it is there to reheat in a day to two.
- ▶ Pack a variety of foods. A meal is defined as 3-5 food groups. Usually packing a small amount of several foods is better accepted than a large portion of 1 or 2 foods.
- ▶ Do as much of the packing the night before as possible. Put the silverware in the lunch bag, bag up the raw veggies, cut or peel the fruit, etc. Less work in the morning means less frustration and less chance of being late for school and work.

What to Pack

Hot foods:

chili, stews (beef or chicken), soups, casseroles, spaghetti, scalloped potatoes & ham, taco meat for salads or tacos, walking tacos with the snack bags of Fritos (pack tomato/lettuce/cheese separate and your child can put it together at lunch), or BBQ beef/pork/chicken

Sandwiches: (combine any of the following)

Bread/Rolls: whole grain, rye, pita, soft tortillas for wraps

Protein: beef & cheddar, beef & swiss, ham & cheddar, chicken/tuna/egg salad (with light dressing), chopped veggies with cheese and hummus, PB&J, BBQ's, or just cheese

Condiments: tomatoes, lettuce, pineapple ring, sprouts or avocado slices

Sides:

Any fresh fruit or fruit canned in light juice, (dip apple, banana or pear slices in juice or sugar water to prevent browning), apple slices with peanut butter, fruit and low fat cottage cheese, yogurt, string cheese, whole grain crackers like Wheat Thins or Triscuits in a variety of flavors, baked potato chips, graham crackers with peanut butter, veggies and dip.

