Eating well: Packed lunches for 1-4 year olds



FIRST STEPS NUTRITION TRUST

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and Rosa Sparks

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By Dr Helen Crawley and Rosa Sparks

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FIRST STEPS NUTRITION TRUST

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First Steps Nutrition Trust is a charity which provides clear, evidence-based and independent information and support for good nutrition from pre-conception to five years of age. For more information, see our website www.firststepsnutrition.org

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Photo resources
For more information about photo resources for different age groups of children and young people, see the website www.firststepsnutrition.org

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About this guide

This guide has been written to provide practical ideas for anyone who is preparing packed lunches for children aged 1-4 years. We hope it will be particularly useful to early years settings who may want to provide guidance to families and child carers about how to provide a nutritious, cost-effective and practical packed lunch for children of this age.

The packed lunches shown in this resource all provide the amount of energy (calories) needed by children of this age at a main meal and, if a range of packed lunches are eaten over a period of a week or more, they will provide the important nutrients that young children need to develop and grow.

Why do we need ideas for packed lunches?

Young children may take a packed lunch to their early years setting when they go for a half-day or full-day session, or may have them for school trips and outings. Increasingly, younger children who are offered free sessions in early years settings are required to bring in packed lunches. Families new to early years settings may need extra support to provide healthy packed lunches for their children.

A packed lunch should provide the same amount of energy and nutrients as a main meal for children of these ages, and should follow the key principles of eating well for this age group.

Healthy eating and physical activity are essential for proper growth and development in childhood. To help children develop patterns of healthy eating from an early age, it is important that the food and eating patterns to which children are exposed – both at home and outside the home – are those that promote positive attitudes and enjoyment of good food.

The packed lunches in this resource are in line with the national nutrition guidance for early years settings in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (see below).

For more information about eating well for 1-4 year olds in early years settings

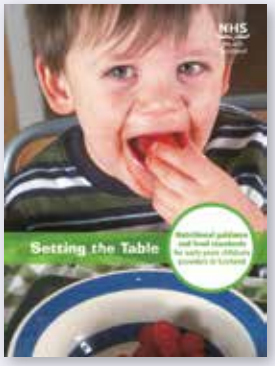


ENGLAND

Eat better, start better: A practical guide

Available at:

https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/eat-better-start-better/



SCOTLAND

Setting the table: Nutritional guidance and food standards for early years childcare providers in Scotland

Available at:

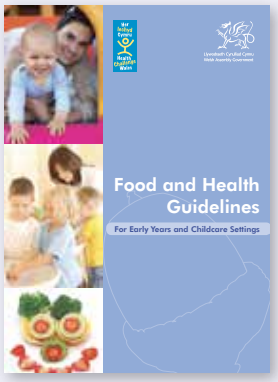
www.healthscotland.com

WALES

Food and health guidelines for early years and childcare settings

Available at:

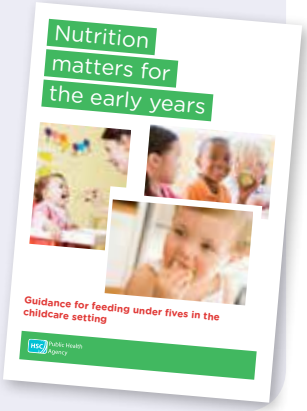
www.wales.gov.uk



NORTHERN IRELAND

Nutrition matters for the early years

www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk



Key principles of eating well for 1-4 year olds



A good variety of different foods is important to ensure all the important nutrients (vitamins and minerals) are included in the diet. Make sure the content of packed lunches is varied from day to day.

Choose good-quality food. Young children need to eat small quantities of good food regularly. The best foods are those that are minimally processed and which have been made from good-quality ingredients. Avoid foods that are 'diluted' – for example, processed meat or fish covered with breadcrumbs, batter or other coatings (such as sausage rolls, Scotch eggs, chicken nuggets or fish cakes) which make them lower in nutrients.

Young children should eat child-sized portions of at least five different fruit and vegetables a day. Where children are reluctant to eat these foods, they should at least taste five different ones every day and have them served with their meals and snacks so they become familiar with them.

Good sources of iron and zinc should be served at main meals. This includes meat, fish, eggs, ground nuts and seeds, and soya products such as tofu. See page 50 for examples of foods that are high in iron and zinc.

Limit sugar intake. Children do not need sugary foods such as sweets, biscuits, cakes chocolate, soft drinks or sugar for energy. Sugary foods can damage teeth and provide calories but few nutrients. Starchy foods – such as potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and yam – are better sources of energy, as they contain other important nutrients too. Use fruit to sweeten yoghurts and desserts.



A good source of calcium, riboflavin and iodine should be served every day. Whole or semi-skimmed cows' milk, cheeses, and unsweetened yoghurt and fromage frais are good sources of these nutrients. For children who do not have dairy products, an unsweetened fortified milk substitute such as soya milk or unsweetened fortified soya yoghurt can provide these nutrients. For details of other dairy substitutes for children, see pages 27 and 35. For more examples of foods rich in these nutrients, see page 49.

Make sure food for 1-4 year olds is low in salt.

Avoid foods designed for adults, take-aways and foods that are high in salt such as processed meat, salty snacks and biscuits, sauces and ready-prepared meals.

Children can drink water.

Children should be encouraged to drink tap water if they are thirsty, and fresh drinking water should be available at all times. Water quenches thirst, does not spoil the appetite, and does not damage teeth.

What to avoid?

- Children aged 1-4 years should not be given foods or drinks containing artificial sweeteners (such as saccharin and aspartame), the preservative E211 or the artificial colours E102, E104, E110, E122, E124 or E129.
- Children should not be given tea, coffee, cola, energy drinks or other drinks that contain caffeine as these disrupt children's sleep. Tea and coffee are also not suitable drinks for under-5s as they contain tannic acid, which interferes with iron absorption.
- Children over 1 year of age do not need fortified milks such as toddler milks or growing-up milks. These are sweeter than animal milks. Also, they do not contain enough of some nutrients and may have too much of others.

How to pack a packed lunch

We have used a range of packed lunch containers which are easily available and not expensive. If packed lunches are provided regularly, it is worth investing in a suitable lunch box and other containers, including a drink container. Early years settings may be able to support families in choosing appropriate containers or buying in bulk so that prices are lower. You can use any suitable packed lunch box, but for information about the boxes and drinks containers we have used, and photos showing 'how to pack a lunch', see pages 8 and 51.

It is useful to have some small containers, within the main lunch box, to keep individual items separate. This will help to keep different components in a good condition and make it easier for children to eat when they are out and about. You may want to wrap sandwiches in tinfoil or place in paper bags to keep them whole. Cutlery may also be needed for some items, and we have used simple plastic spoons and forks where needed. For details of where to get all these items, see page 51.

Things to think about when packing a packed lunch

- Is the food easy for little ones to eat?
- Are the pieces manageable?
- Is anything a choking risk: for example, pieces of sausage, jelly cubes, chunks of apple, whole cherry tomatoes, popcorn, whole nuts or grapes? Make sure foods are cut into smaller pieces and nuts are only served finely chopped or ground.
- Can children easily see what it is they are eating?
- Will the food travel well? Will it stay in one piece?
- Are the lids on the small containers secure, so that they don't leak? (That is, the containers for holding meal components such as yoghurt.)
- Is there a fork or spoon for items that are hard to eat with your fingers?
- Are the contents colourful and appetising when the box is open?
- Is there a variety of small amounts of different foods that will tempt small appetites?
- Have children tried the foods at home first so the foods will be familiar to them when they open the lunch box?

Choosing a lunch box

Choose a simple lunch box which is able to keep the contents safe and well packed.

A box with compartments is a good option as different parts of the lunch can be kept separate and it is easy to see what is in the lunch box. Include a re-usable spoon or fork if needed.





Using small containers in the lunch box

Small containers with lids can be used inside the lunch box, to keep ingredients separate. These can be used, for example, for yoghurt or houmous, or for portions of fruit and vegetables.



Drinks containers and cups

Some of the example packed lunches shown in this resource include a milk or milk alternative as a drink, while others include water.

Drinks can be sent in a simple bottle that the child can drink from. It is easy to add the child's name to the bottle, and it can be kept cold with the packed lunch in a fridge. In many early years settings, simple drinking cups will be available and children might like to have their drink poured into the same type of cup used by the other children. Cups should be open-topped and children should be encouraged to sip and swallow rather than 'suck' a drink. If bottles are used, these should have a 'free flow' spout.





Children who are not used to drinking out of a cup might find it easier to start with a small cup that is easy to hold.

Keeping packed lunches cool

Packed lunches should be kept in a fridge after they have been prepared. You can prepare the lunch box the night before and keep it in the fridge. When the children arrive at the early years setting, the packed lunch should again be put straight into a fridge, or stored with cold packs in a cold bag.

Food safety and hygiene tips

The person who prepares the packed lunch should wash their hands before making up the lunch.

If you make foods in advance and store them in the fridge, use them within 48 hours.

Children under 5 should always be supervised when eating.

It's particularly important to store meat safely in the fridge, to stop bacteria from spreading and to avoid food poisoning:

- Store raw meat and poultry in clean, sealed containers on the bottom shelf of the fridge, so they can't touch or drip onto other food.
- Follow any storage instructions on the label, and don't eat meat after its use-by date.
- Keep cooked meat separate from raw meat.

Anything left over in the packed lunch should be thrown away at the end of the day. Families may want to see how much their child has eaten and may prefer to throw out the leftovers themselves rather than that being done in the childcare setting.

'Best before' and 'use-by' dates

- Food with a 'use-by' date goes off quite quickly and it can be dangerous to eat after this date.
- Food with a 'best before' date is longer-lasting. It should be safe to eat, but may not be at its best quality after this date.

Children should wash their hands before eating a meal, and this is equally true when they are given a packed lunch.

Making good-value packed lunches

We have calculated the costs of each of the example packed lunches shown in this resource. They range from 40p to £1.30 per lunch, with an average cost of 75p.

We have shown the cost of each lunch as:



How did we calculate the costs of the lunches in this resource?

We used standard supermarket prices to calculate the costs:

- We used everyday value or basic range prices for foods such as pasta, rice, lentils, vegetable fat spread, vegetable oil, fresh carrots, onions, potatoes, canned tomatoes and canned beans, as these foods are nutritionally similar regardless of the branding or range.
- We used fruits and vegetables from the supermarket ranges. These foods will be cheaper if you buy them from market stalls or local produce providers.
- For packed lunches that include eggs, we used free-range eggs.

If you shop around, buy in bulk and use fruits and vegetables seasonally, it is likely that the cost of these packed lunches could be reduced.

The more expensive lunches contained more expensive fruit and vegetables, such as blueberries, mango or baby sweetcorn. These could be replaced with cheaper items to bring the costs closer to the average packed lunch cost. Lunches that contain meat are more expensive than those that use eggs, canned fish or protein alternatives such as lentils, beans or peanut butter.

Tips for keeping food shopping costs down

- **Cook from scratch.** Making meals from scratch is cheaper and healthier than buying ready-made items which also often have a lot of unnecessary sugar, salt and preservatives added. You can make bigger quantities of dishes and use some for packed lunches for the family and some for a meal. The more you make of something, the cheaper it usually is to make it at home.



Do you want ideas for simple, cost-effective recipes to make at home? You can download our *Eating well recipe book* from www.firststepsnutrition.org



- **Children don't need 'children's food'!** You pay a lot for a logo, small portion pack or convenient food item. Instead, you can easily make your own lunch box items and make the packed lunch look fun – for example, by decorating the lids of containers with stickers.
- **Buy own-brand goods.** The quality is generally the same as popular brands. The only real difference is the price.
- **Buy saver versions of some food items.** Saver canned vegetables – like canned tomatoes or beans, saver frozen vegetables, dried pasta and rice, saver cheese or yoghurt – are often good choices. Avoid saver versions of meat products like sausages or burgers, as these are likely to be low in meat content and high in fat and salt.
- **Keep food fresh.** Store fresh food in the fridge if possible. It will last longer and you will throw less away.

- **Serve meat less often.** Meat is a good source of iron (see page 50) but is expensive. You can use less meat in dishes by adding more vegetables, as well as peas and beans (such as chickpeas, lentils or red kidney beans) to add extra protein. The example packed lunches on pages 18-48 give lots of ideas for non-meat ingredients.
- **Get the best deals on fruit and veg.** Find out if there is a food co-op or a fruit and veg scheme in your area that sells quality fruit and vegetables at a lower price to help people in their communities access affordable fresh food. Street markets are nearly always cheaper than supermarkets for fruit and vegetables, but supermarkets can have useful special offers on some items.
- **Choose your fruit and vegetables carefully.** Don't buy fruit and vegetables that are overly ripe unless you are sure that you will use them quickly.
- **Buy frozen fruits and vegetables** if you have a freezer or if you will use them on the day you buy them. It's often cheaper to buy frozen fruits and vegetables, and you can use just the amount you need. They contain the same minerals and nutrients as fresh ones, need no preparation and, if you can store them, they are often the cheapest way of adding vegetables to dishes.
- **Avoid pre-cut, pre-peeled and packaged fresh vegetables and fruits.** They are more expensive than buying loose fruits and vegetables, and lose nutrients as soon as the pack is opened.
- **Stick to the list!** Shopping costs can get out of control quickly if you don't have a plan or shopping list. If you plan your meals ahead, you won't buy food that gets wasted.
- **Compare prices.** There are lots of websites where you can compare the cost of food at different supermarkets – for example, www.mysupermarket.com
- **Beware of offers.** Only buy offers such as 'buy one get one free' if you would buy that food or brand anyway, or are certain you will eat both, or are able to share the extra one with a friend.

What should go into a packed lunch for 1-4 year olds?

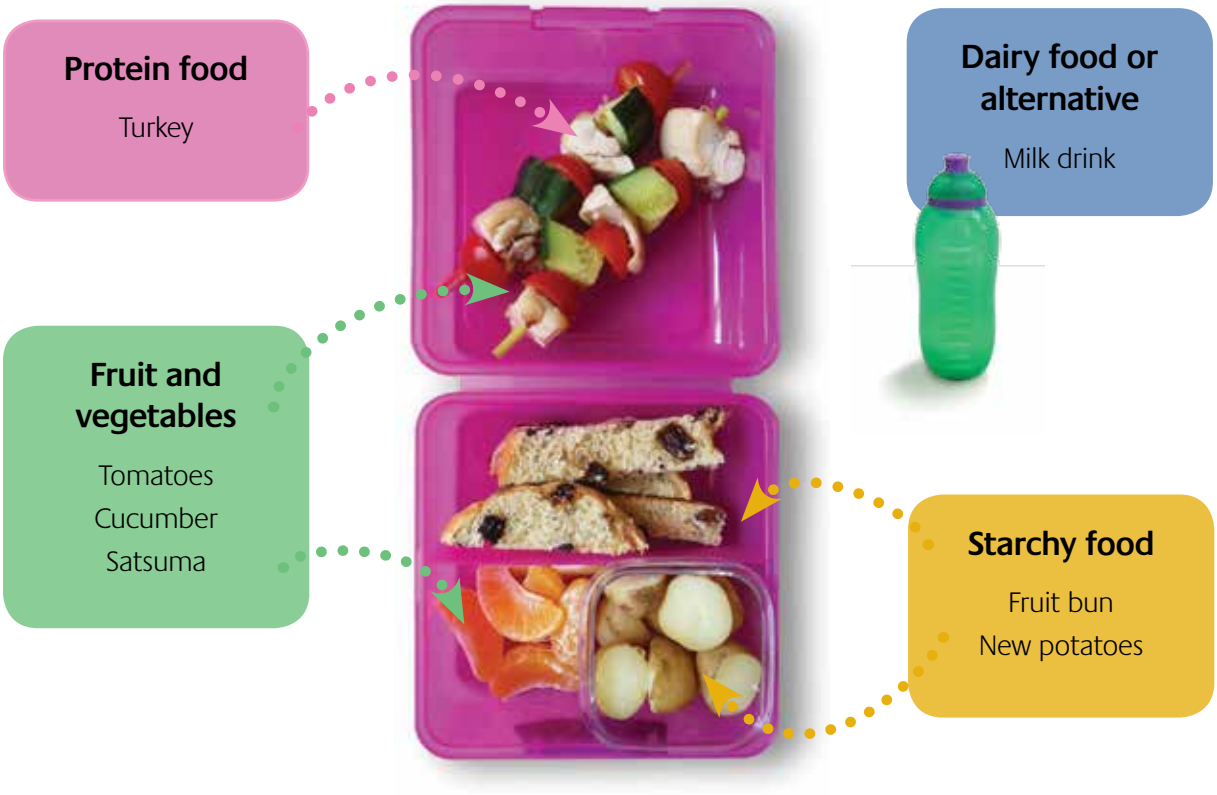
1 or 2 portions of STARCHY FOOD	1 portion of PROTEIN FOOD: meat, fish, eggs, beans, lentils or other alternatives	At least 1 portion of VEGETABLES	At least 1 portion of FRUIT	At least 1 portion of MILK OR DAIRY FOODS, or alternatives
For example: White or wholegrain bread or rolls, bagel, tortilla or wrap, pitta bread or chapatti Cooked potato, yam, pasta, noodles, rice, couscous, polenta or other grains Fruit bun, malt loaf or raisin bread	**For example:** Chicken, turkey, beef, lamb, pork, sardine, tuna or salmon Egg Houmous or other pulses and beans Dahl or other lentil dishes Tahini or other seed spreads Tofu Nut butters	**For example:** Cucumber Carrots Tomatoes Celery Red or green peppers Sweetcorn Mixed salad Green beans Sugar snap peas Peas	**For example:** Apple Pear Banana Clementine Strawberries Grapes Kiwi Melon Pineapple Mango Fruit canned in fruit juice Dried fruit: raisins, apricots, figs or dates	**For example:** **Milk to drink:** Whole milk for children under 2 years Semi-skimmed milk for children 2 years and over **Dairy-free milk alternatives:** Unsweetened calcium-fortified soya milk, oat milk or almond milk **Dairy foods:** Plain yoghurt Plain fromage frais Cheese Rice pudding Semolina pudding Custard

Examples

Egg roll, cucumber and tomato, and yoghurt and blueberries



Turkey kebabs, new potatoes, fruit bun, satsuma and milk drink



Ideas for packed lunches for 1-4 year olds

On the following pages we give examples of 15 packed lunches (see the list on the next page). When putting together our packed lunches we have considered the following:

- ☑ Do the packed lunches, on average, meet the energy and nutrient requirements for a main meal for children aged 1-4 years?
- ☑ Are the packed lunches varied?
- ☑ Are some of the packed lunches suitable for children who may eat a vegetarian or vegan diet or who avoid gluten, dairy products or eggs?
- ☑ Are the packed lunches robust? Will they travel to the early years settings and be manageable for children of this age to eat?
- ☑ Will the ingredients discolour or go soggy once prepared?
- ☑ Are the packed lunches cost-effective?
- ☑ Are they easy to prepare, and are the instructions clear and simple?

Portion sizes

The portion sizes we show for the packed lunches in this resource meet the average energy and nutrient needs of 1-4 year olds as a main meal. Some children will eat less than this, but children's appetites will vary daily and weekly, and particularly when they have growth spurts. Always offer the amounts of fruit and vegetables shown, as it is important that children get used to eating these foods at every meal.



Packed lunches in this resource

KEY: DF = Dairy-free EF = Egg-free GF = Gluten-free
V = Suitable for vegetarians VV = Suitable for vegans
£ = 40p to 69p ££ = 70p to 99p £££ = £1.00 to £1.30

For more on gluten-free alternatives, see page 48.

						Page
Boiled egg, cheese cubes, toast slices and broccoli spears, and raisins	V				£	18
Cheese and cucumber sandwiches, green beans and red pepper, and rice pudding with raisins	V		EF		£	20
Chicken tortilla, carrot and green pepper sticks, satsuma segments and Greek yoghurt			EF		££	22
Chicken, pasta, red pepper, lettuce, kiwi and milk drink			EF		££	24
Dahl, chapatti, rice and tomato, and soya yoghurt with grapes	V	VV	EF	DF	£	26
Egg roll, cucumber and tomato, and yoghurt and blueberries	V				£££	28
Mixed beans, pitta bread, houmous and cucumber, and apple sauce and custard	V		EF		££	30
Peanut butter and banana sandwiches, cucumber, and dried apricots, and soya milk drink	V	VV	EF	DF	£	32
Pitta bread with houmous and carrot, banana and soya milk drink	V	VV	EF	DF	££	34
Pizza, carrot sticks, yellow pepper, dates and milk drink	V		EF		£	36
Rice and peas, jerk chicken, sweetcorn, tomatoes and mango			EF	DF GF	£££	38
Roast vegetable and chickpea couscous, with soya yoghurt and strawberries	V	VV	EF	DF	£	40
Sardine sandwiches, tomatoes, peas and banana, and milk drink			EF	DF	£	42
Tuna and sweetcorn pasta, red pepper, celery, malt loaf and melon			EF		££	44
Turkey kebabs, new potatoes, fruit bun, satsuma and milk drink			EF		£££	46

Boiled egg, cheese cubes, toast slices and broccoli spears, and raisins

V £



- 1 boiled egg, shelled and sliced
- A small matchbox-size piece (20g) hard cheese or Edam cheese, cubed
- 1 slice wholemeal bread, toasted and sliced
- 2 or 3 broccoli spears, cooked
- 1 tablespoon (20g) raisins

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DRINK

Serve water with the packed lunch shown on the left.



OTHER PACKED LUNCH IDEAS

If children like softer cooked vegetables, instead of cooked broccoli you could serve:

- cooked carrot sticks, parsnip sticks or butternut squash cubes
- steamed mange tout or sugar snap peas, or
- cooked frozen peas, broad beans or green beans.

LUNCH BOX TIPS

Why are eggs a good food choice for young children?

- Eggs are a cheap, easy and very nutritious food, and a great lunch box addition for young children. Eggs provide protein, iron, zinc, phosphorus, selenium, antioxidants, vitamins A and D, riboflavin, iodine, choline and many other nutrients.
- Eggs can be boiled and mashed or sliced into halves, quarters or rounds.
- Make sure that eggs are thoroughly cooked when serving to under-5s – both the white and yolk should be cooked until hard. Eggs need to be boiled for at least 7 minutes to ensure the white and yolk are cooked through.

Cheese and cucumber sandwiches, green beans and red pepper, and rice pudding with raisins

EF V £



- 1 wholemeal roll
- 1 tablespoon grated cheese
- 6 slices cucumber
- 10 green beans
- 5 strips pepper
- 2 tablespoons (60g) rice pudding with raisins (See recipe below.)

RECIPE

Rice pudding with raisins

This recipe makes 4 portions of about 60g.

- 60g pudding rice
- 250ml semi-skimmed milk
- 80g raisins

1. Place the pudding rice and semi-skimmed milk in a pan and slowly bring to the boil, stirring all the time.
2. Simmer gently for about 15 minutes until the rice is softening, stirring regularly.
3. Add the raisins and cook for a further 5 minutes.
4. Cool before serving.

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DRINK

Serve water with the packed lunch shown on the left.



OTHER PACKED LUNCH IDEAS

- Instead of rice pudding, try semolina pudding.
- Instead of raisins, try dried chopped apricots, dates or figs.

LUNCH BOX TIPS

For vegan children

Rice pudding and other puddings can be made with unsweetened calcium-fortified soya milk, oat milk, almond or coconut milk instead of cows' milk. You will probably need to use more of these milks for the same amount of rice, and the pudding may take longer to cook.

Say 'cheese'!

Cheese is a convenient packed lunch food, and in small amounts can be a useful addition to lunch boxes for young children. However, cheese is high in salt and it is important not to serve it every day. Cottage cheese and soft cheese are lower in salt than hard cheeses. Mozzarella, Emmental and Wensleydale cheeses are lower in salt than most other hard cheeses.

Chicken tortilla, carrot and green pepper sticks, satsuma segments and Greek yoghurt

EF ££



- 1/4 cooked breast of chicken (40g), cut into strips
- 1/8 cucumber, cut into thin strips
- 1 tortilla or wrap
- 3 baby carrots (40g), topped and tailed, washed, and cut in half lengthways
- 1/4 green pepper, washed and cut into sticks
- 1 satsuma or clementine, divided into segments
- 1 large tablespoon (40g) Greek yoghurt

DRINK

Serve water with the packed lunch shown on the left.



OTHER PACKED LUNCH IDEAS

- Instead of chicken you can offer turkey or any other plain roast meat or Quorn fillet strips. Or for vegan children, tofu is a good substitute.

LUNCH BOX TIPS

Serving tortillas

- Some children might like a filling wrapped in a tortilla and cut into pieces. Others may prefer their food served separately so they can see the component parts they are eating.
- You can cut the tortilla into triangles and serve it as it is, or lightly grill it to make it into crispy tortilla triangles.

Take care when cooking and serving chicken

- Make sure chicken is cooked thoroughly to ensure that any harmful bacteria are killed.
- When cooking chicken, cut into the middle to check that the meat is no longer pink, the juices run clear and it's piping hot (with steam coming out).
- Don't store cooked chicken in the fridge for more than 2 or 3 days, and make sure it is kept well away from any raw meat.
- It is particularly important that, when packed lunches which contain meat are brought into child care settings, they are kept cold until serving.

Chicken, pasta, red pepper, lettuce, kiwi and milk drink

EF ££

Check that the pasta is egg-free.



- 3 tablespoons cooked pasta shapes (about 30g dried pasta)
- Meat from half of a chicken thigh, cooked and cut into pieces (40g)
- 1/4 red pepper, washed and cut into chunks or slices
- 2 leaves crispy lettuce, sliced
- 1 kiwi fruit, peeled and cut into slices or chunks
- 100ml semi-skimmed milk or unsweetened calcium-fortified soya milk

DRINK

Serve milk with this packed lunch.
(See page 35 for milk alternatives.)



LUNCH BOX TIPS

Pasta

Pasta is a useful addition to lunch boxes as it is easy for small children to pick up and eat, and it comes in a variety of shapes. We used multi-coloured alphabet-shaped pasta (made with tomato for red pasta and with spinach for green). You could try spirals (fusilli), penne quills, macaroni, shells (conchiglie), bows (farfalle) or little ears (orecchiette).

Don't overcook pasta, as it will taste better cold if it has some 'bite'.

The key to good nutrition is having a variety of foods, so don't serve pasta every day. Alternate it with other starchy foods such as potato, rice or bread.

Dahl, chapatti, rice and tomato, and soya yoghurt with grapes

DF EF V VV £



- 1 small chapatti (30g)
- 2-3 tablespoons dahl (80g) (See recipe below.)
- 1-2 tablespoons cooked white or brown rice (50g)
- 3 cherry tomatoes, cut into quarters (30g)
- 2 tablespoons soya yoghurt (60g)
- 10-12 grapes, halved (40g)

RECIPE

Dahl

This recipe makes 4 portions of about 80g each.

- 75g red lentils
- 300ml water
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic paste
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric powder

1. Place all the ingredients in a pan and bring to the boil.
2. Simmer for 15 minutes until the lentils are soft.

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DRINK

Serve water with the packed lunch shown on the left.



LUNCH BOX TIPS

Non-dairy alternatives

If children do not eat or drink dairy foods, or are on a vegan diet, there are alternatives you can use for cows' milk or cows' milk yoghurt. Make sure any alternative you choose is unsweetened and calcium-fortified. Many milk alternatives are also fortified with other nutrients such as riboflavin (vitamin B2) or vitamin B12. You can find more information about non-dairy alternatives in the resource *Eating well: vegan infants and under-5s* at www.firststepsnutrition.org.



Egg roll, cucumber and tomato, and yoghurt and blueberries

V £££



- 1 brown roll (60g)
- 1 boiled egg (60g), mashed with 1 teaspoon vegetable fat spread
- 4 sticks of cucumber (30g)
- 3 cherry tomatoes, cut into quarters (30g)
- 2 tablespoons whole-milk yoghurt (60g)
- 1 handful blueberries (40g)

DRINK

Serve water with the packed lunch shown on the left.



OTHER PACKED LUNCH IDEAS

- Instead of a roll you could serve:
  - 2 slices of bread (brown, wholemeal or granary are best)
  - 1/2 pitta bread in slices, or
  - 1/2 bagel
- You can spread the vegetable fat spread on the roll and serve the roll and egg separately.

LUNCH BOX TIPS

Some children may prefer to eat their packed lunch meal from a plate rather than out of the lunch box. In some settings moving the food on to a plate can help all the children to eat together and feel part of the group. It might be possible for some food sent from home to be heated up in child care settings as well if this can be done safely.



Mixed beans, pitta bread, houmous and cucumber, and apple sauce and custard

EF V ££



2-3 tablespoons (75g) canned mixed beans, drained (Choose canned beans in water.)

1 tablespoon houmous (See recipe on page 34.)

3/4 pitta bread, sliced (40g)

6 sticks cucumber (40g)

2 tablespoons custard (40g) (See recipe below.)

1 tablespoon apple sauce (30g) See recipe below.)

RECIPE

Custard

This recipe makes 4 portions of about 60g.

1 heaped tablespoon custard powder

250ml semi-skimmed milk

1. Mix the custard powder with a little of the cold milk. Bring the rest of the milk to the boil in a saucepan.
2. Add the custard powder mixture to the hot milk and simmer until thickened, stirring all the time.

Apple sauce

This recipe makes 4 portions of about 30g.

2 medium eating apples, peeled and cored

1 tablespoon water

1. Cut the apple into small pieces. Place in a saucepan with the water and gently bring to a simmer, stirring until the apple cooks down to a sauce consistency.

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£ = 40p to 69p ££ = 70p to 99p £££ = £1.00 to £1.30

DRINK

Serve water with the packed lunch shown on the left.



LUNCH BOX TIPS

Sugar in desserts

There is no need to add sugar to custard, rice pudding or cakes if you are using fruit to sweeten them. You can use dried fruit, fresh fruit or fruit purées to add sweetness and bulk. Never use artificial sweeteners in food for children.

See page 45 for a recipe for for apple-sweetened cookies.



Peanut butter and banana sandwiches, cucumber, and dried apricots, and soya milk drink

DF EF V VV £



- 2 slices wholemeal bread (50g)
- 1 level tablespoon peanut butter (30g)
- 1/4 banana (30g)
- 5 sticks cucumber (40g)
- 6 dried apricots (30g)
- 150ml unsweetened calcium-fortified soya milk

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DRINK

Serve milk with this packed lunch.
(See page 35 for milk alternatives.)



LUNCH BOX TIPS

Peanut allergy

- If any child in a childcare setting has a nut allergy, then all parents and carers should be asked to avoid sending in packed lunches that contain any nuts or nut products. However, nuts are a useful source of energy and nutrients for vegan children, and there is no need for children to avoid nuts unless an allergy has been diagnosed.
- You can also find nut butters made from cashew nuts, hazelnuts and almonds, and spreads made from seeds such as tahini (sesame seed) spread.

Pitta bread with houmous and carrot, banana and soya milk drink

DF EF V VV ££



- 1 pitta bread (60g)
- 1 falafel (25g)
- 1 heaped tablespoon houmous (60g) (See recipe below.)
- 4 carrot sticks (40g)
- 1 banana
- 150ml unsweetened calcium-fortified soya milk

RECIPE

Houmous

This recipe makes 4 portions of about 60g.

- 1 large can (400g) chickpeas, drained (240g drained weight)
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic paste
- 1 tablespoon (30g) tahini (sesame seed spread)
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon water

1. Place all the ingredients in a blender and blitz to the desired consistency. Houmous can be smooth or lumpy.
2. If you don't have a blender, you can mash the ingredients together with a fork.

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DRINK

Serve milk with this packed lunch.
(See below for milk alternatives.)



LUNCH BOX TIPS

Dairy-free milk options

For children who don't drink cows' milk, there are a number of options.

Unsweetened fortified soya milk.
The cheapest option is unsweetened fortified soya milk, which is fortified with calcium, riboflavin, iodine and vitamin B12. This has the same amount of protein as cows' milk but half the energy (calories) of whole animal milk. If using this as the main drink for under-2s, serve twice as much as you would whole milk.

Other options include:

Unsweetened calcium-fortified oat milk. This has the same amount of energy as semi-skimmed milk, but is much lower in protein. It is typically fortified with calcium, iodine, riboflavin and vitamin B12. This costs more than twice as much as soya milk.

Unsweetened calcium-fortified almond milk. This is very low in energy. (You would need to serve 5 times as much to get the same energy content as whole milk.) It is also very low in protein. It is fortified with calcium, iodine, riboflavin and vitamin B12. This milk costs twice as much as soya milk.

Unsweetened calcium-fortified coconut milk. This has the same amount of energy as skimmed milk, but has a low protein content, and while it is fortified with calcium, iodine and vitamin B12, it does not have riboflavin added. This is the most expensive non-dairy alternative.

Never give rice milk to children under 5.

Pizza, carrot sticks, yellow pepper, dates and milk drink

EF V £



1 small pizza (80g)
(See recipe below.)

4 carrot sticks (40g)

4 sticks yellow pepper (40g)

6 dates, sliced

100ml semi-skimmed milk

RECIPE

Pizza

This recipe makes 4 small pizzas, of about 80g each.

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1 small onion, peeled and diced

1 teaspoon garlic paste

1 large can (400g) chopped tomatoes

1 teaspoon dried mixed herbs

4 small round pitta breads (40g each)

2-3 tablespoons grated cheese (80g)

1. Place the oil in a pan and heat. Add the diced onion and garlic paste and cook until softening, stirring occasionally.
2. Add the chopped tomatoes and dried herbs and simmer until reduced by at least a half, to make a pizza topping consistency sauce.
3. Spread the tomato sauce on the round pitta breads and sprinkle with the grated cheese. Place the pizzas under a hot grill and cook until the cheese is melted.
4. Allow to cool and then cut into pieces.

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DRINK

Serve milk with this packed lunch.
(See page 35 for milk alternatives.)



LUNCH BOX TIPS

Pizza base

- You can also use English muffins or French bread as a quick pizza base.

Pizza toppings

- You can put all sorts of things on mini-pizzas and, if children like food with faces or patterns on, you can use vegetables to do this. For example, you can add peppers, mushrooms, fresh tomatoes, canned pineapple, onion or sweetcorn.
- You can use either mozzarella or hard cheese as a topping, but you only need a small amount of either type of cheese.
- You can make pizza without cheese for children who avoid dairy products. Sprinkle the tomato topping with extra vegetables and some chopped beans or seeds to add protein.
- You can also top pizzas with canned tuna fish, pilchards or sardines.

Rice and peas, jerk chicken, sweetcorn, tomatoes and mango

DF EF GF £££



- 3 tablespoons rice and peas (100g) (See recipe below.)
- 40g jerk chicken
- 4 baby sweetcorn, steamed and cut in half (50g)
- 3 cherry tomatoes, quartered (30g)
- 1/4 mango, cut in cubes or slices (50g)

RECIPE

Rice and peas

This recipe makes 4 portions of about 100g.

- 5 tablespoons water (150ml)
- 100ml coconut milk (1/4 of a 400ml can)
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 4 tablespoons dried white rice (120g)
- 4 tablespoons drained red kidney beans (100g)

1. Mix the water with the coconut milk and dried thyme, and add the rice.
2. Bring the mixture to the boil and then simmer for 15 minutes, stirring regularly until the rice is tender.
3. Add the kidney beans and stir well.

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DRINK

Serve water with the packed lunch shown on the left.



RECIPE

Jerk chicken seasoning

You can rub chicken breasts or thighs with a low-salt jerk seasoning rub. Use 1-2 teaspoons seasoning rub per chicken breast. Leave the chicken to marinate in the rub for several hours in the fridge, and then grill or bake the chicken until cooked all the way through.

This recipe makes enough rub for 4 chicken breasts.

- 1 teaspoon allspice
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon chilli powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic purée
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1. Mix all the ingredients together.

OTHER PACKED LUNCH IDEAS

- You can use a low-salt seasoning like the jerk seasoning recipe here on other meat (such as turkey or pork), or on fish, if children like well-flavoured foods. You can adapt the amount of chilli you add so that it is not too firey for young palates, or you can leave the chilli out altogether. You can also use the mix on Quorn for children who have a vegetarian diet, or on tofu for children who have a vegan diet.

Roast vegetable and chickpea couscous, with soya yoghurt and strawberries

DF EF V VV £



- 5 tablespoons roast vegetable couscous (125g) (See recipe below.)
- 1 heaped tablespoon drained chickpeas (40g)
- 3 tablespoons unsweetened fortified soya yoghurt (75g)
- 4-6 strawberries, sliced (40g)

RECIPE

Roast vegetable couscous

This recipe makes 4 portions of about 125g.

- 1/2 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1/2 onion, peeled and diced
- 1/2 courgette, diced
- 1/2 red pepper, de-seeded and diced
- 1/2 yellow or orange pepper, de-seeded and diced
- 100g dried couscous
- 200ml boiling water

1. Toss the diced vegetables in the oil in a baking tray and place in the oven at 180°C / 350°F / Gas 4 for 15 minutes until the vegetables are soft.
2. Pour the boiling water over the couscous and leave to stand, covered, for 4 minutes and then fluff up the couscous with a fork.
3. Add the diced vegetables to the couscous and stir well.

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DRINK

Serve water with the packed lunch shown on the left.



OTHER PACKED LUNCH IDEAS

- You can serve the couscous and vegetables separately, instead of mixing them together.
- You can add lots of different things to couscous. It is a popular dish with most children, as it looks very colourful.
- You can add other small or chopped vegetables such as peas, broad beans, cut green beans, leek, aubergine, chopped mint leaves or parsley, fresh tomato, cucumber or mushroom.
- You can also add dried fruit such as raisins or chopped apricots with the vegetables.
- Instead of chickpeas, you can add other cooked pulses, such as black-eyed beans, red kidney beans, borlotti beans or butter beans. For a non-vegetarian version, you can add diced cooked chicken or tuna fish.





Sardine sandwiches, tomatoes, peas and banana, and milk drink

EF £



- 2 slices brown bread (50g)
- 1 teaspoon vegetable fat spread (5g)
- 2 sardines, drained and mashed (50g)
- 1 tablespoon peas (40g)
- 3 cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 1 banana
- 100ml semi-skimmed milk

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DRINK

Serve milk with this packed lunch.
(See page 35 for milk alternatives.)



OTHER PACKED LUNCH IDEAS

- You can make mini-sandwiches with a range of fillings. Make sure fillings are moist but won't make the bread soggy if left for a few hours. A thin layer of fat spread can help prevent fillings seeping into the bread.
- Canned fish is a rich source of nutrients and can be easily mashed as a sandwich filling. The bones in canned fish are soft and can be mashed into the fish, but check there are no bones remaining. Or you can try pilchard, sardine, tuna, mackerel or canned salmon.
- Other useful sandwich fillings include: nut butters, egg, houmous, roast meats, roast vegetables, avocado, or soft cheese with vegetables such as cucumber, tomato, red pepper or spring onion.
- You can cut sandwiches into little squares or triangles without creating waste. Although cutting other shapes from the sandwiches like stars or hearts can look interesting, they do make a lot of waste sandwich so you will have to make twice as many (although the sandwich maker can always enjoy the leftovers!)



Tuna and sweetcorn pasta, red pepper, celery, malt loaf and melon

EF ££

Check that the pasta is egg-free.



- 3-4 tablespoons tuna and sweetcorn pasta (165g) (See recipe below.)
- 4 strips red pepper (30g)
- 3 sticks celery (30g)
- 1 slice fruited malt bread (35g)
- 1/8 melon, cubed (50g)

RECIPE

Tuna and sweetcorn pasta

This recipe makes 4 portions of about 165g.

- 120g dried pasta, boiled until tender
- 4 tablespoons sweetcorn canned in water (120g)
- 1 can (160g) tuna in brine, drained (drained weight 120g)
- 2 tablespoons medium fat soft cheese (80g)

1. Boil the pasta, following the instructions on the packet.
2. When cooked, drain the pasta and immediately toss it with all the other ingredients until well mixed.

DRINK

Serve water with the packed lunch shown on the left.



OTHER PACKED LUNCH IDEAS

- Fruited malt bread is a useful occasional food for lunch boxes as it is lower in sugar and fat than most cakes or biscuits and is a good source of fibre, iron, folate and other B vitamins.
- Other low-fat, lower-sugar options include fruit teacakes, plain or fruit scones or fruited Scotch pancakes. An easy apple and raisin oat cookie recipe is shown below.

Apple and raisin oat cookie

This recipe makes 4 portions of about 30g.

- 1 tablespoon vegetable fat spread (25g)
- 5 tablespoons rolled oats (50g)
- 1/2 eating apple, cooked and made into a purée (30g)
- 1 heaped tablespoon raisins (30g)
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon powder



1. Heat the oven to 180°C / 350°F / Gas 4.
2. Grease a baking sheet with a little vegetable fat spread, or line it with baking paper.
3. In a bowl, mix all the ingredients together and make into a soft mixture.
4. Put heaped dessertspoonfuls of the cookie dough on to the baking sheet and flatten with a fork. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes until lightly golden.
5. Take the tray out of the oven and leave the cookies to cool on the tray for a few minutes before transferring them to a cooling rack.

You can make these simple healthy cookies for 8p each.

Turkey kebabs, new potatoes, fruit bun, satsuma and milk drink

EF £££



Cooked turkey cut into cubes (40g), 3 cherry tomatoes cut in half (30g), and 4 chunks cucumber (30g) made into kebabs. (See recipe below.)

2-3 new potatoes, cooked (80g)

1/2 fruit bun (50g)

1 small satsuma, divided into segments

100ml semi-skimmed milk

RECIPE

Turkey and vegetable kebabs

This recipe makes 8 kebabs of about 50g each. Serve 2 kebabs per portion.

160g cooked turkey, cut into cubes

12 cherry tomatoes, cut in half

1/2 cucumber, cut into 16 chunks

4 plastic drinking straws

1. Cut the drinking straws in half.
2. Using a skewer, make holes in the turkey, tomato and cucumber so you can thread them on to the straws as a kebab.

Do not use cocktail sticks, wooden sticks or shorter pieces of straw to make kebabs.

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DRINK

Serve milk with this packed lunch.
(See page 35 for milk alternatives.)



OTHER PACKED LUNCH IDEAS

- Instead of making the ingredients into a kebab, you can serve the turkey, tomato and cucumber in cubes.

LUNCH BOX TIPS

Potatoes

Potatoes are a versatile, starchy food that contain lots of the nutrients also found in vegetables.

- Small new potatoes make a good packed lunch choice for young children.
- Potatoes can be used in salads.
- Home-made potato wedges can be served cold in a lunch box.

Making a gluten-free lunch box

Potatoes, rice and maize (corn) are all naturally gluten-free and are easy and versatile options when making gluten-free packed lunches.

Instead of ...	Use these gluten-free options ...
Bread or rolls	Bread made with gluten-free flour, buckwheat flour, or cornmeal, or combinations of gluten-free flours such as rice flour, potato flour, maize flour, corn flour, soya flour or tapioca flour
Scones	Potato cakes made with rice flour
Crackers	Rice cakes
Wraps or chapattis	Flat breads made with chickpea flour or maize flour
Tortilla	Cornmeal or maize flour tortilla
Pasta	Rice, quinoa, buckwheat or potatoes; gnocchi made with potatoes and rice flour; polenta (made with cornmeal)
Noodles	Rice noodles

Good sources of vitamins and minerals

Vitamin A

Animal sources
- butter
- canned salmon
- cheese
- egg
- full-fat milk
- herrings
- kidney
- liver
- pilchards canned in tomato sauce
- smoked mackerel

Non-animal sources
- apricots (dried, fresh or canned)
- blackcurrants
- broad beans
- broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- cabbage (dark)
- canteloupe melon
- carrots
- honeydew melon
- mango
- nectarine
- orange
- peach
- peas
- prunes
- red peppers
- runner beans
- spinach
- sweet potatoes
- sweetcorn
- tomatoes
- watercress
- vegetable fat spread

Riboflavin

Also called vitamin B2.

Animal sources
- cheese
- eggs
- kidney
- lean meat or poultry
- mackerel
- milk
- pilchards
- salmon
- sardines
- tuna
- yoghurt

Non-animal sources
- almonds
- fortified breakfast cereals
- granary bread
- mushrooms
- soya beans
- spinach
- wheatgerm bread

Folic acid

'Folic acid' is the name given to the synthetic form of the B vitamins known as folates, but is used as a general term here for this vitamin.

- broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- cabbage
- cauliflower
- fortified breakfast cereals
- green leafy salads
- melon
- oranges
- parsnips
- peanuts
- peas
- potatoes
- runner beans
- spinach
- tomatoes
- wholemeal bread
- yeast extract

Calcium	**Dairy sources** milk cheese cheese spread yoghurt fromage frais	**Non-dairy sources** canned salmon dried fruit egg yolk muesli orange peas, beans and lentils pilchards, sardines soya drink fortified with calcium spinach tofu white bread / flour
Iron	**Animal sources** All meat and meat products provide iron, but very good sources include darker meats and meat products made from beef, lamb, duck, venison, and offal meats such as heart, liver, kidney, oxtail and tongue. Oil-rich fish – including herrings, pilchards, sardines, salmon, whitebait and tuna – are also a good source of iron. Eggs (particularly egg yolk) are also a good source.	**Non-animal sources** baked beans blackcurrants black-eyed peas broad beans broccoli chickpeas dried apricots fortified breakfast cereals lentils raisins soya beans spinach and spring greens tofu weet bisks bread and flour
Iodine	**Dairy sources** butter cheese fromage frais and yoghurt milk ice cream	**Non-dairy sources** egg fish fish paste seaweed shellfish
Zinc	**Animal sources** canned sardines canned tuna or pilchards cheese cold cooked meats eggs ham kidney lean meat liver milk poultry shrimps and prawns	**Non-dairy sources** beans and lentils brown or wholemeal bread nuts plain popcorn sesame seeds tofu wholegrain breakfast cereals, such as puffed wheat, branflakes or weet bisks

Packed lunch boxes and drinks containers

You can use any packed lunch containers, but below are details of the ones we bought for the photos in this resource.

We used lunch boxes and bottles from the Sistema range (http://sistemaplastics.com)

These boxes and bottles are widely available, reasonable in cost, hard-wearing, come in a bright range of colours and are BPA-free.







We used small containers from the OXO Good Grips range (http://www.oxouk.com/s-21-good-grips.aspx).
These are also BPA-free.



Cutlery came from RICE (https://www.rice.dk).
These products can also be bought widely across the UK.

The babycups were sourced from www.babycup.co.uk





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