FN1416 (Reviewed Nov. 2026)

Brown Baggin' It

A Guide to Lunches on the Go



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Whether you carry your lunch in a box or a bag, keep it nutritious and safe. A carefully packed lunch can provide many of your daily nutritional recommendations.

Brown bags actually are the second choice for transporting foods. Insulated lunch boxes protect foods from being crushed and help keep them at safe temperatures. Insulated lunch bags also help hold foods at safe temperatures. A mishandled lunch can cause foodborne illness. Be especially careful about potentially hazardous foods such as meat, cream-based foods and mixtures of food. Follow these tips to pack a safe and nutritious lunch.

Know the Limitations on Cooking and Storage at the Destination

- Are there cooking facilities, including a microwave oven? If not, do not pack foods that need to be heated.
- Is a refrigerator available for cold storage of food? If not, pack nonperishable items or include a frozen gel pack or frozen drink box to help keep food at safe temperatures.

Prepare It Safely

- Wash hands thoroughly before preparing lunches.
- Keep utensils and countertops used in preparing lunches clean.
- Thoroughly wash any thermos that carried hot foods (soup, chili, leftover casseroles) or cold foods (milk, etc.); rinse with boiling water.
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly with plenty of running water.

Keep Hot Foods Hot and Cold Foods Cold

- Many sandwiches freeze well and will thaw by lunchtime if placed in a lunch box early in the morning. Save time by preparing and freezing some extra sandwiches ahead of time. Don't overdo the butter or mayo because the bread may become soggy during thawing. Sandwiches containing fruit or vegetables generally don't freeze well; pack ingredients such as lettuce and tomato separately.
- Keep gel packs or juice boxes in the freezer. Just before leaving home, place one in your bag or box. It should keep perishable food safe until lunchtime whether in a brown bag or lunch box.
- To transport hot foods such as soup or chili, rinse a thermos with boiling water just before filling it with boiling-hot food.
- Keep lunches out of the sun, inside a classroom or in the coolest possible place.
- Don't save perishable leftovers from your lunch, such as meat sandwiches or leftover soup.
- Don't reuse brown bags because bacteria can grow and contaminate tomorrow's lunch.
- Discourage children from "trading" lunches; there's no way of knowing if the traded lunch was properly prepared and safely stored.

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Keep Good Nutrition and Variety in Mind

- A nutritious lunch could contain two servings of grains, a serving of vegetables, a serving of fruit, a serving of protein foods and a serving of dairy. Go easy on high-fat foods, such as potato chips, which provide few nutrients. For active children, an occasional dessert also is a welcome addition to lunches.
- Eat a variety of foods every day. Try new combinations of foods so lunches don't become boring.
- If the lunch is for a child, encourage them to help with the preparation.



Create a Sandwich

Most box lunches begin with a sandwich, but sandwiches don't have to be routine. The possibilities are endless. Add some creative fillings to make them nutritious and delicious. Use the following chart for some possibilities for mix-and-match sandwiches.

*Choose a bread from the first column, add a meat or cheese selection from the second column and top it with vegetables, fruits and/or condiments of your choice. Remember to go easy on high-fat spreads, such as butter, margarine and mayonnaise.

Breads	Meats/Cheeses Other Protein	Vegetables and Fruits	Spreads and Condiments
Italian	Cooked ham	Lettuce and other greens	Ketchup
White	Meat loaf	Celery, sliced	Mayonnaise or salad dressing
Rye	Dry salami	Green pepper	Relish
Whole wheat	Frankfurter	Alfalfa sprouts	Peanut butter
French	Turkey bologna	Carrots or zucchini, shredded	Italian dressing
Pumpernickel	Swiss cheese	Cauliflower, chopped	Ranch dressing
Cracked wheat	Cheddar cheese	Cucumbers, sliced	Butter or margarine
Assorted rolls or buns	Monterey Jack or Co-Jack cheese	Olives, sliced	Thousand Island dressing
English muffin	Colby cheese	Tomato slices	Mustard
Bagel	Gouda cheese	Red cabbage, thinly sliced	Jelly
Pita	Cream cheese	Mushrooms	Taco sauce
Submarine roll	American cheese	Green onion, sliced	Yogurt or sour cream
Quick breads, leftover waffles or pancakes	Cottage cheese with herbs	Raisins	Spices and herbs
Whole-grain crackers	Cooked eggs	Pineapple tidbits	
Soft pretzels	Egg salad, tuna salad	Bananas, apples or peaches, sliced	

For more information about nutrition and food safety, see www.ag.ndsu.edu/food

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North Dakota State University is an equal opportunity educator and employer. This work is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Requests for accommodations related to disability may be made at 701-231-1865.

June 2006, May 2009, web2021, web-11-26