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One Month of Mini-Meals for the Balanced School Day



Children on the balanced school day timetable need to eat the same amount of food during the day as children on a traditional timetable - only the timing of when food is eaten is different. Look inside for 40 mini-meal ideas for the nutrition breaks during the balanced school day.

What should I pack in each mini-meal?

You should pack nutritious foods from the four food groups in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. Nutrition breaks are not the time to eat items like chips, candy and pop. Keep in mind that it doesn't matter if your children eat more at the first break and less at the second break or vice versa. It's more important that the foods they eat are healthy and satisfying.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
W E E K 1	First Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> small muffin yogurt applesauce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2-1 cup dry cereal milk* raisins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2 bagel with cheese orange juice* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2 chicken sandwich milk banana 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2 english muffin with ham and cheese clementine
	Second Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2 cheese sandwich broccoli & dip fruit juice oatmeal cookies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 mini pitas with egg salad carrot sticks & dip milk pudding water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2 bagel with cheese red peppers & dip plum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> chicken noodle soup soda crackers yogurt grapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 slice veggie pizza cucumbers & dip pear chocolate milk
W E E K 2	First Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 blueberry pancakes (yes they'll eat them cold!) orange sections milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tomato soup made with milk whole grain crackers kiwi pieces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2 ham sandwich applesauce water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> whole grain crackers cheese cubes pineapple chunks water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> dry cereal with dried cranberries yogurt
	Second Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pasta salad with mozzarella cheese pepper & dip juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> small muffin celery & dip fruit cup milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/2 ham sandwich carrot sticks & dip fig bars milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> split pea soup 1 slice whole wheat bread milk pudding peach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cheese tortilla with salsa dip green grapes animal crackers water

Pack food so it doesn't go bad. Three important steps:

- 1. Be clean.** Clean hands, a clean working area & clean utensils are a must to prepare food that is safe to eat
- 2. Keep cold foods cold.** Here are some tips:
 - Make sandwiches the night before & keep them in the fridge
 - Pack items like coleslaw, potato salad & bean salad in a thermos
 - Use an insulated lunch bag
 - Add frozen juice or milk or an ice pack to help keep food cold.
- 3. Keep hot food hot.**
 - Pack hot foods in a thermos. They should be piping hot when packed. Put hot foods in the thermos in the morning.

Can convenience foods be nutritious?

Pre-packaged snack foods, pre-packaged lunch trays and ready-to-serve items are often costly and poor nutrition choices. If they're packed once in a while they won't offset an otherwise healthy eating plan but it would be wise not to rely on them regularly. You can boost the nutritional value of convenience foods: add frozen veggies to canned soups and pastas when heating them to put in the thermos; make creamed soups with milk; include veggies sticks & fruit juice with store-bought lunch kits.

Lunch Box Chili

1 cup (250 ml) cooked rice
 3/4 cup (175 ml) canned kidney beans, rinsed & drained
 1/2 cup (125 ml) frozen corn kernels
 1 medium tomato, chopped
 1/2 green pepper, chopped
 1/4 tsp chili powder
 In a microwave-safe container, stir ingredients until combined. Microwave on high, loosely covered, for 2 to 3 minutes or until hot. Spoon into a thermos.
 Variations: use 1 cup cooked couscous, egg noodles or pasta instead of rice; use frozen peas or carrots instead of corn; use black beans, romano beans or chick peas instead of kidney beans.

* Adapted from *Great Food Fast*, Dietitians of Canada.

Best beverages

Milk (white or chocolate), water and fruit juice are the best choices. Note that "fruit drink" punch or beverage is mostly sugar & water; fruit juice comes from fruit.

Tips & Tidbits for Packed Meals

Plan for healthy eating

Get top marks for nutrition by using fewer convenience foods. When your fridge, freezer & shelves are stocked with the right foods, healthy meals & snacks can be prepared quickly & easily. Here are some ideas of foods to have on hand:

Grain Products

- bread & buns • bagels • pita • tortillas
- pasta, noodles • cereal • muffin • pancakes
- rice • crackers • bread sticks • couscous
- oatmeal cookies • rice cakes • loaves

Milk Products

- white milk • chocolate milk
- yogurt • cheese
- pudding (made with milk)
- soups (made with milk)

Vegetables & Fruit

- apples • oranges • peaches • bananas
- melon • grapes • fruit cup • juice
- broccoli • carrots • celery
- applesauce • pineapple • cucumber
- dried fruit (raisins, apricots, cranberries)

Meat & Alternatives

- baked beans • eggs • meatloaf • tuna
- tofu • hummus • beef • turkey • chicken
- pork • salmon • bean salad

Delicious dips

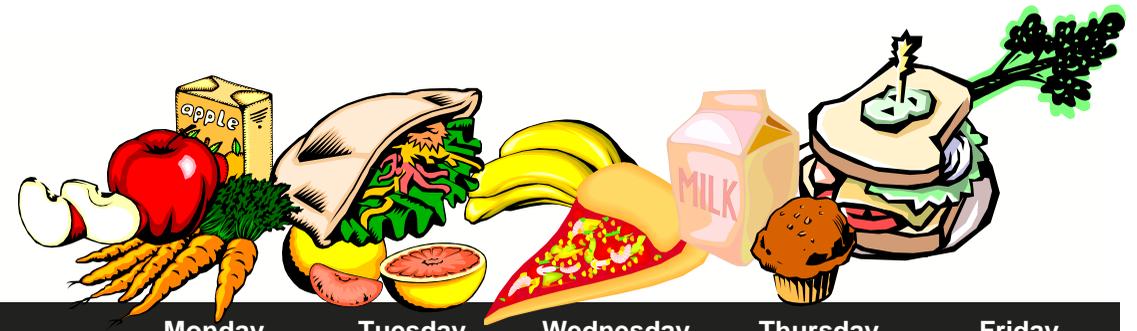
Dips make veggies more appealing. Pack a small container of your child's favourite salad dressing (ranch is popular with kids) along with veggie sticks. Or, make your own dips by mixing lower fat mayo, plain yogurt or sour cream with these combinations: garlic & dill; salsa; honey mustard; shredded cucumber; ketchup & chili powder.

Make ahead tips

- Bake double batches of muffins and freeze the extras to put into meal bags.
- Bake breads & loaves (banana, pumpkin and date are some ideas) then slice, wrap and freeze individually. They can be added, frozen, to the lunch bag and will thaw by break.
- Make extra pancakes on the weekend and freeze individually on cookie sheets. Wrap in packs of two so they're ready to add to lunch bags.
- When making one-pot dishes like soups, stews and casseroles, make larger batches and freeze individual portions in microwave safe dishes. Thaw individual portions in the fridge over night, reheat to piping hot in the morning and spoon into a thermos for the meal bag.
- Cut up extra veggies when making stir fry dishes to use with veggies and dip at mini-meals for the next day.
- When cooking pasta or rice, cook extra and freeze it in 1 cup portion sizes. These grains thaw quickly (place in strainer and pour boiling water over) and are handy for making pasta or rice salads in a flash.

Are cereal bars & granola bars a good choice?

Not always. Some are more like chocolate bars, especially if they're covered in frosting & filled with chocolate chips & marshmallows. Check the ingredient list & look for rolled oats as the first ingredient. Pack them once in a while, not every day.



		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
WEEK 3	First Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 graham crackers with cream cheese • fruit cup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • muffin • banana • milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raisin bread with butter • yogurt • orange juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mini pitas with grated cheese • kiwi • water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pumpkin loaf • yogurt tube • apple juice
	Second Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/2 roast beef sandwich • carrots & dip • plum • milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bean salad with mini pitas • apple • date square • water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lunch Box Chili ** • whole wheat roll • pear • milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tuna wrap • cauliflower & dip • peach • chocolate milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • macaroni & cheese • peppers & dip • grapes • water
WEEK 4	First Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 slice banana bread • dried apricots • cheese slice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hot chocolate made with milk • 1 slice whole wheat bread with jam • banana 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raisin bread with cheese slice • juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dry cereal • peach • yogurt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • muffin • pear • milk
	Second Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • salmon wrap • celery sticks & dip • applesauce • chocolate milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mini pitas with corned beef • tossed salad (dressing on the side) • milk pudding • water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • baked beans with shredded cheese • whole wheat bread • baby carrots & dip • ice water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hummus • pita triangles • cucumbers • tomato wedges • milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cheese cubes • ham slices • whole grain crackers • rice krispie square • juice

Note: See the section "What's A Serving?" to know how much food to send.

* 1 serving of milk is 250 mL (1 cup), 1 serving of juice is 125 mL (1/2 cup)

** See recipe

Balanced School Day Tips:

- It doesn't really matter which foods your children choose to eat at the breaks, it's more important that they eat a variety of foods over the course of the day.
- Sandwiches can be cut in half and wrapped separately—one half for each break.
- Foods that are packed in a thermos may be hotter and taste better if they are eaten during the first break.
- Cold foods like juice and yogurt can be semi-frozen to help them stay cold to the second break.



How will I know if my child is getting enough?

You'll need to ask! A healthy, active child's appetite is your best guide to how much food to pack. The two mini-meals for each day in this planner are designed to provide about half of the daily energy needs for kids 7-13 years old. Younger children need smaller portion sizes. Since boys need more energy per day than girls, some boys may need more servings of food. If your child tells you he's still hungry after finishing his mini-meals, pack more whole grain products, vegetables and fruit. If food is coming home at the end of the day, pack smaller portions.

What's a serving?

Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating gives details about the serving size and the number of servings to eat from each food group. The serving size of a food is the same for everyone older than five years. The number of servings of food to eat varies depending on age, sex and activity level. Here's a condensed version of that information to guide you on portions to pack in the mini-meals.



What's a Serving?

Food Group	Number of servings to pack for the school day	Examples of one serving
Grain Products	2-3	1 slice of bread; 1/2 cup pasta or rice; 1/2 bagel, bun or pita; 1 cup flaked cereal; 1 small muffin; 8 soda crackers
Vegetables & Fruit	2-4	1/2 cup juice; 1 medium apple, orange, banana, pear, plum, carrot, pepper; 1 stalk of celery; 1/3 of a cucumber; 1/2-1 cup of grapes; 3 tbsp raisins; 1/2 cup applesauce or fruit cup; 2 slices of pineapple; 1 cup tossed salad
Milk Products	1-2	1 cup of white or chocolate milk; 1 cup of soy beverage; 3/4 cup yogurt; 50 grams hard cheese; 2 slices processed cheese; 2 tbsp cheese spread
Meat & Alternatives	1/2-1	50-100 grams meat, fish or poultry; 1-2 eggs; 1/3-2/3 of a can of salmon or tuna; 1/3 cup tofu; 2 tbsp hummus; 1/2-1 cup baked beans or bean salad

Serving Sizes for Younger Children

For kids 4-5 years old, a portion size varies from one-half to the full size for foods in each food group. Generally, the size of a portion increases with age. For example, a two year old may eat a half slice of bread, whereas a four year old is more likely to eat a whole slice. Both of these can be counted as one child-size serving of grain products.

