

Packing Lunch at Home

By preparing your lunch at home, you not only have control over portion sizes and variety, you also get to prepare a lunch that is tasty, nutritious and budget-conscious. If you do not have access to a refrigerator at work, use cold-packs in a small cooler. These handy packs can keep your lunch cold for hours and they're reusable!

The next time you leave your work station to go out to lunch, count how many minutes it takes you from the time you leave your chair until the time you actually receive your meal and begin to eat. Then add the number of minutes from the time you finish eating until you get back to your work station. Chances are your total amount of time *not* eating is at least 30 minutes. That amounts to 2 1/2 hours per week if you work a five-day work week. You could easily spend less than 2 hours a week at the grocery store and preparing your lunches for the week! Not only is it time-efficient, but a lunch prepared at home can give you more control over your food choices for maximum nutrients and taste.

Here's an example of how packing your lunch at home gives you more control over your food choices. Not many restaurants serve a peanut

butter sandwich with low-sugar/whole-fruit jelly on whole wheat – a healthier option than a large bowl of pasta alfredo with buttery garlic bread. You can bring a PBJ from home and eat it whenever you take a break. Include with it a glass of low-fat **milk**, some **fruit** and your favorite **vegetables** on the side, **and you will have fed yourself better – and cheaper – than you would have with the less balanced, higher fat, starch-heavy restaurant option.**

And just how did you feed yourself better from the above example?

Your lunch from home included healthy portions from the five basic food groups:

- Whole grains (from the 2 slices of whole wheat bread)
- Meat/beans (from the peanut butter)
- Milk (from your 8 oz. glass of low-fat milk)
- Fruit
- Vegetables

Other packing tips:

- Cut up vegetables and fruit into single servings and store them in individual containers or "baggies" in the refrigerator. This will make lunch packing easier and faster.
- Pick one evening of the week to prepare your meat and bean servings. Cook meats and beans in advance to help cut down on preparation time later. Be sure to check how long uncooked and cooked meats and beans will stay fresh.
- Buy enough yogurt to last for at least a week. The expiration date is usually printed on the container.
- Keep a supply of plastic forks and spoons at your work-station for convenient use.
- If you must prepare multiple lunches, have an assembly line going when preparing lunches, or alternate evenings for each adult in the family to prepare lunches for the next day for the entire family. Buy and pack healthy favorites that are most likely to be eaten.

Use your portions guide to help you prepare your lunch at home:

Example 1:

Fruit	Milk	Vegetables	Grains	Meat and Beans
1/2 cup blueberries	1 (8 oz.) container of low-fat yogurt (about 100 calories)	Salad	Whole grain cereal (mixed in with the yogurt)	1 skinless/boneless grilled chicken breast. Slice and add to your salad.

Example 2:

Fruit	Milk	Vegetables	Grains	Meat and Beans
1 small apple	1 slice of low-fat cheese for sandwich	1/2 cucumber cut up Lettuce and tomato for sandwich	2 slices of bread	2-3 ounces of low-sodium roast beef

Example 3:

Fruit	Milk	Vegetables	Grains	Meat and Beans
1 large banana	1 tablespoon of low-fat sour cream	1 cup of baby carrots	Whole grain crackers with your salad	1/2 cup black bean soup. Top your soup with 1 tablespoon of low-fat sour cream.