

Packed Lunches



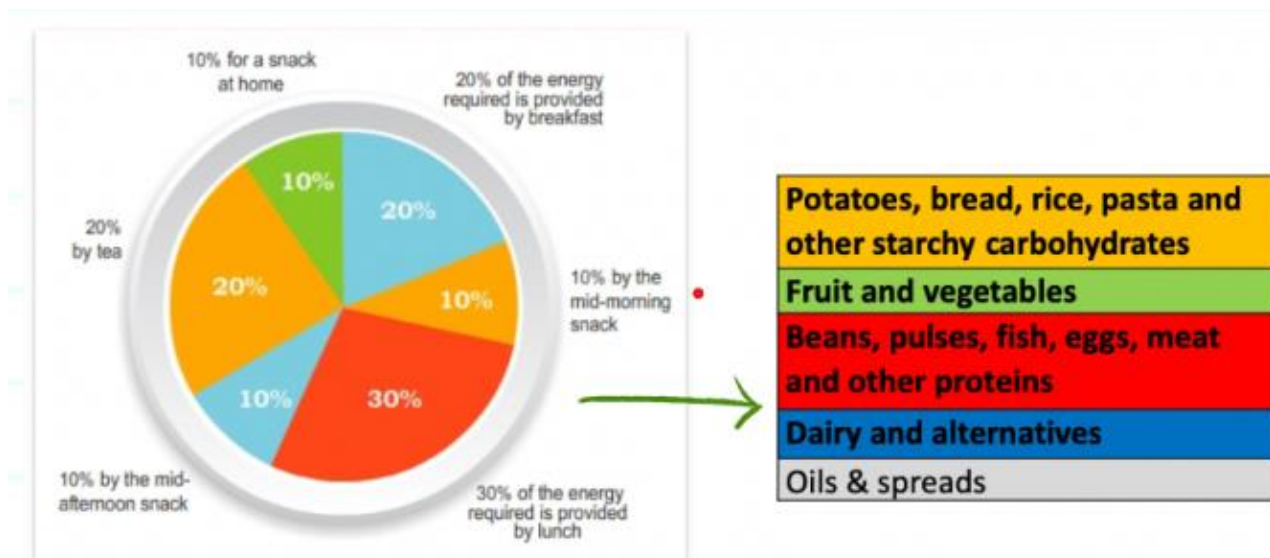
A healthy lunch will provide children with the nutrients they need to grow, develop & learn.

Many children rely on a packed lunch for a mid-day meal where there is limited food provision due to lack of kitchen or cook or family choice. There has been a real increase in children taking packed lunches to schools/settings due to the impact of covid-19.

The key to a balanced nutritious diet is variety to ensure packed lunches are healthy, balanced, and tasty!

All meals and snacks are important requirements for nutrition throughout the day. It is vital that the packed lunches provide all the nutrition and energy that a cooked nutritious meal provides.

This diagram shows the breakdown of energy required across a full day for children having a school lunch or packed lunch. 30% of energy is required throughout lunchtime:



Sustainability & protecting the environment

It is possible to assemble a quick (and popular) packed lunch of pre-sliced bread, pre-sliced ham, cheesy triangles, a chocolate treat, packet of crisps and fruity juice BUT.....

Think about the impact on the health of the child and the planet when planning packed lunches.

Often packed lunches contain:

- Lots of plastic wrappers and containers which leads to plastic waste
- High fat, sugar & salty snacks
- Expensive commercial snack foods
- Ultra-Processed foods
- Products with 'puff', 'wafer' and 'string' style textures e.g. processed cheese strings, wafer biscuits and puff style crisps. These types of foods can have a negative affect on children's health including speech development as often these types of foods do not require chewing. Chewing food helps build muscle in the child's mouth and develop speech.

Avoid these types of products:



These above types of foods have high fat, sugar and salt content which can lead to tooth decay, high blood pressure and rising overweight and obesity levels in children.

What does a healthy packed lunch look like?

Below are some visual examples of healthy packed lunches:



- Fresh water, milk or sugar free juice
- Brown/wholegrain sandwich/wrap/pitta – ham, chicken, cheese, houmous filling)
- Pasta salad – mixed with raw fruit/vegetables
- Breadsticks, carrots, cucumber with houmous dip
- Piece of fruit or chopped up vegetable sticks
- Limit high fat foods such as crisps and biscuits
- Homemade carrot/blueberry muffins

Examples of Healthy & Balanced Packed Lunches – First Steps Nutrition

