

# Bag It Up

## Guide E-214

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Home Economics



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It may not be in a brown bag or any bag at all, but carrying lunch from home can be a great choice.

### WHY PACK A SACK LUNCH?

*Economics*—Sack lunches should be less expensive than eating out. However, if wise choices are not made, sack lunches can be more expensive. This is especially true for children who could eat a hot lunch as part of the school lunch program. If the child's sack lunch is made up of purchased packets of individual servings of foods such as chips, cookies and puddings, it may cost more than the cafeteria meal.

Adults with access to a company cafeteria may also find it more expensive to carry their lunch. Cost can be kept down by using leftovers.

*Nutrition*—You control the nutritional quality of a bag lunch. You also have responsibilities. Select, prepare and pack foods so they will be safe, flavorful, and nutritious.

Some people like bag lunches because of what they do not have. A bag lunch can be made low in sugar, salt, fat, or calories.

*Time, Convenience, Energy*—Having a sack lunch means not standing in cafeteria lines or waiting for food to be served. This is important if meal time is limited or other errands must be done during the noon hour. It may be more convenient and energy efficient to carry a lunch because there will be no need to make a trip to a restaurant or deli.

*Taste*—Some prefer the flavor of a brown bag lunch. Favorite foods can be included. Remember to provide a variety of foods every day. Nutritional problems are less apt to occur when there is variety in the diet.

### WHAT GOES IN?

Just as breakfast gets you through the morning, lunch keeps you alert through the afternoon. Hungry people have trouble concentrating on schoolwork or on their jobs, and may not perform at their highest levels.

A good lunch includes four parts:

1. Bread or cereal
2. Fruits and/or vegetables
3. Protein
4. Beverage, preferably milk for children

Dessert, which is optional, could be a fruit. When packing a lunch, include one or more foods from each part. If milk is not the beverage, choose a calcium source like cheese, or yogurt.

Protein comes in many forms including meats, fish, cheese, eggs, nuts, beans, and peanut butter. It does not have to be in a sandwich. Leftovers are easily used in sack lunches if containers are used to keep them cool. Leftovers also may need less preparation than a sandwich and are quickly reheated if a microwave is available.

### SANDWICH IDEAS

#### Meat

- Lean deli meat with vegetables such as shredded carrots, tomato, chile, green peppers, olives or mushrooms
- Cold roast beef or pork, chopped, with chopped fruits or vegetables like apple, celery, radishes, or cucumber. Mix with light mayonnaise.
- Dried beef mixed with cheese and horseradish.
- Corned beef mixed with mustard and mayonnaise.

#### Fish

- Salmon or mackerel with grated raw carrots, hard cooked egg and light mayonnaise.
- Sardines plain or with light mayonnaise.

## Chicken

- Sliced cold chicken with cranberry jelly.
- Chicken spread mixed with pecans.

## Cheese

- Sliced or grated with pickles, nuts, onion, green chile, or crushed pineapple.
- Cottage cheese with minced green pepper and chopped dried prunes or apricots with chopped beet pickles or parsley and salad dressing.

## Egg

- Mix chopped hard-cooked egg with light mayonnaise or salad dressing. Add one or more of the following: onion, celery, raisins, green pepper, carrots, nuts, olives, or grated cheese.
- Cold scrambled eggs with salad dressing.

## Nuts

- Chopped peanuts or pecans with cream cheese and raisins.

## Baked Beans

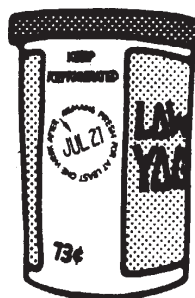
- Plain or mashed beans mixed with chile sauce, chopped pickle, and minced onion.

## Peanut Butter

- With sliced apple or banana.
- With sliced dill pickle
- Mixed with grated raw carrot, raisins, and mayonnaise.

## NON-SANDWICH IDEAS

- Hard-cooked eggs in the shell. Provide salt and pepper, seasoned salt, or chili powder for dipping.
- Cold meats. A pork chop, fish filet, or fried chicken
- Cheese cubes. Try varieties like Swiss, taco cheese, or jalapeño pepper cheese, in addition to cheddar.
- Chile con carne.



- Soup or stew.
- Leftover enchiladas, pizza, lasagna or spaghetti or casseroles
- Stuffed vegetables or fruit. Green pepper, banana pepper, or apple stuffed with a sandwich filling.
- Yogurt, plain or with chopped fruit or vegetables.

- Lettuce sandwich. Roll sandwich filling in a large leaf.
- Wrap-arounds. Wrap sliced meat or cheese around pickles, cheese, celery, or cucumber slices.

## BREAD OR CEREAL

These provide energy, vitamins and fiber. More fiber is present in whole wheat, rye, or cracked wheat. If white bread is your choice, be sure it is enriched.

Calorie watchers should not cut breads out. Remember, most of a sandwich's calories come from the filling, not the bread.

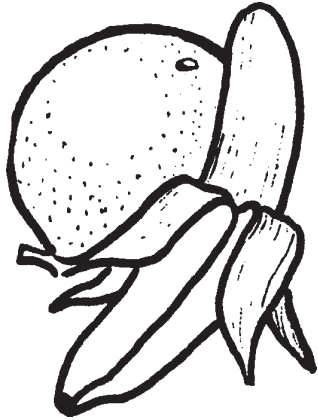
Any bread will work. Some suggestions are:

Enriched white	Crushed wheat
Whole wheat	Pumpnickel
Cracked wheat	Italian
French	Tortillas
Rye	Biscuits
Oatmeal bread	Cornbread
Cheese bread	Muffin
Vegetable breads (carrot, zucchini)	Bagels
	Pita bread



Other cereals are good if they can be kept hot or cold:

Macaroni and cheese	Rice
Spaghetti	Potato salad
Macaroni Salad	



## FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

The best brown bag lunches will have at least one fruit and one vegetable. Fruits and vegetables are high in vitamins, minerals, and fiber. When served raw, they need little preparation. Good raw fruit and vegetable choices include apples, oranges, bananas, peaches, apricots, melons, carrots, celery, broccoli, jicama and salad greens. Drain fruits canned in sugar syrup before packing them in tight containers.

Fruit or vegetable salads are good choices. Pack cut fruits such as apples, pears, or peaches with dressing or fruit juices to prevent darkening. Pack the dressing for green salads separately to keep the greens crisp until ready to eat.

## BEVERAGES

Milk is an excellent choice because it contains calcium and other minerals needed by everyone, young and old. It needs to be kept cold. Use a vacuum bottle or pack milk in a small container and freeze. It will thaw by meal time and help keep other foods in insulated containers cool until then, too.

Water is another good choice, especially if the meal contains cheese or yogurt, which contain the same nutrients as milk. Water can be frozen in reusable bottles to help keep other foods in insulated containers cool. When choosing juice, check labels for the term 100% fruit juice rather than fruit drinks which contain less juice. Juices can also be frozen to help keep the drink and the meal cool.

Other choices to consider are tea, coffee or broth. Fruit drinks and soft drinks are high in sugar and low

in other nutrients and should only be packed in lunches occasionally.

## SNACKS AND DESSERTS

Try to choose those low in sugar, salt, and fat. Fruits (both fresh and dried), nuts, and seeds are good choices for both snacks and desserts. It will save money if you buy large bags of these items and repackage them in sandwich bags or plastic tubs yourself. However, only purchase amounts you can use while the food is still fresh. Prepackaged chips, cakes, and other snacks may be convenient, but many offer little nutritional value and are expensive.

It is all right to have a cookie or other sweet occasionally. Choose cookies with oatmeal, nuts, or dried fruit for a more nutritious dessert.

## SAFETY

Be sure foods are safe to eat before packing them for lunch. Store food properly after it is purchased. Wash hands before handling the food. Clean all working areas and utensils. Brown bags are a favorite way to carry lunches, but not just any brown bag should be used. Pack foods only in paper bags purchased for that purpose. Other bags may be dirty or contaminated with bacteria that could cause food poisoning. Use paper bags only once. Washable plastic bags can be reused.

Lunches in paper or plastic bags must be refrigerated after arriving at work or school. Remember, food should not be kept above refrigerator temperatures for more than two hours. Insulated lunch boxes are another option for packing meals. Insulated bags could also be used. These must be packed with ice or frozen drinks. Thermos bottles or jars are good to keep hot food hot or cold food cold.

These are all good options if refrigeration is unavailable.

Some examples of foods that can be left at room temperature:

*BREAD-CEREAL*—Bread, crackers, chips.

*FRUIT AND VEGETABLE*—Fresh, dried, or individual cans of fruits or vegetables; dehydrated soups.

*MILK*—Canned pudding.

*MEAT*—Individual serving sized cans of meat spreads, lunch meat, and fish. Jerky or peanut butter and nuts.

## TIME SAVERS

Prepare large batches of sandwiches ahead of time in assembly line fashion and freeze extras. They will keep two weeks. To keep bread from getting soggy, spread a thin layer of margarine or cream cheese evenly to the edge of each slice. Fillings that freeze well are meat, poultry, cheese and cheese spreads, peanut butter and nut spreads. Egg whites, mayonnaise, and fresh vegetables will not freeze well.

Buy fresh fruits that only need washing before packing. Use vegetables that can be eaten raw such as tomatoes, carrots, cauliflower, and peppers. Use convenience foods to save time. You may want to make your own from dinner leftovers, or buy in large packages and repack in small containers to save money.

Set aside part of the refrigerator, freezer, and cupboard for lunch items.

To avoid a morning rush, pack meals the night before and refrigerate. Perhaps leftovers could be packed for lunches as the evening meal is cleared from the table.

## BROWN BAG HINTS

- Make every day sandwiches special with special breads such as banana, carrot, or zucchini bread.
- Two thin slices of meat taste better than one thick one.
- Share your lunch. Pack enough for you and a friend today. Let your friend bring lunch tomorrow.
- Vary the type of sandwich. Use different fruits and vegetables and listen for new ideas. Brown bag meals with variety are fun to open and eat.
- Include a note or other surprise in a child's lunch box.

Need new ideas for sandwich making? Here are some possible sandwich combinations! If you are watching calories, they are listed for each ingredient so you can see how they stack up.

<i>Vegetables</i>	<i>Calories per 1/2 cup</i>	<i>Cheese</i>	<i>Calories per oz</i>	<i>Breads</i>	<i>Calories per 2 slices</i>
Lettuce	10	Sharp cheddar	115	Hot dog bun	130
3 slices tomatoes	15	Swiss	105	French	120
Cucumber	15	Colby	110	Pumpernickel	160
Fresh spinach	20	Processed American	105	Bagel	150
Celery	10	Mozzarella	80	Pita	100
3 green pepper rings	5	1/2 cup cottage cheese	110	Submarine roll	400
1 tablespoon onion	5	Gouda	100	Italian	110
Avocado	130	Cream cheese	105	Croissant	200
Carrot	20	Edam	105	English muffin	140
Cauliflower	20			Cracked wheat	130
				White	125
				Rye	120
				Whole wheat	135
<i>Meats</i>	<i>Calories per oz</i>	<i>Spreads</i>	<i>Calories per 1 Tbsp</i>		
Meat loaf	56	Ketchup	20		
Roast beef	59	Dijon mustard	10		
Tuna packed in water	36	Butter or margarine	100		
Chicken	47	Salad dressing	75		
Bologna	90	Mayonnaise	110		
Frankfurter	180	Mayonnaise dressing	75		
1 frank (8/lb.)		Peanut butter	100		
Cooked salami	70	Thousand Island dressing	75		
Turinger cervelat	100	Italian dressing	85		
(summer sausage)		Jelly	55		
Bacon, per slice	33				
Braunschweiger	100				

*Adapted from T3133 "Bag it Up" by Barbara J. Brown, R.D., Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University with later contributions made by Mae Martha Johnson, Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist.*

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