



## Makeover Your Sack Lunch

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Everyone loves to watch a good makeover. Whether it's people or homes, you can't turn on the TV without catching a good "before" and "after." With school starting again, it's time to think about what your children will be eating during the day. So why not makeover your child's sack lunch?

Liz Weiss and Janice Bissex, authors of *The Mom's Guide to Meal Makeovers* took ordinary sack lunches and turned them into healthy, kid-tested meals tasty enough to please even the toughest critics—your kids.

The makeover philosophy is simple: weave great nutrition and flavor back into your kids' lunches. Each revamped lunch features a fiber source, a fruit, a vegetable if possible, and a low fat dairy source for calcium. After you pack that in, you can even add a cookie or two.

When it comes to drinks, water is always a great choice. If your child prefers juice, try packing a 4 or 6.25 oz. juice box (100 percent juice) with a water bottle. Purchasing milk at school can be a great way to get in another serving of calcium. Try to eliminate sweetened fruit drinks, sports drinks, and soda which contribute to excess sugar and calories in your child's diet.

Plain and simple, parents are busy. That's why each lunch makeover takes only 10 to 15 minutes to prepare. That time can be cut in half if some of the prep work is done the night before. All it takes is a little planning and before you know it, it becomes a habit.

**Before:** PB&J Sandwich, Chips, Two Cookies, and Bottled Water  
**After:** PB&J with Granny Smith Apples, Melon Balls and Strawberries, Skim Milk

A peanut butter and jelly sandwich is the king of all school lunches. The remade PB&J features peanut butter and thinly slice Granny Smith apples on whole wheat bread. You can also do peanut butter, raisins and banana on a whole-wheat pita.

**Before:** Ham & Cheese on White, Pudding Cup and Juice Box  
**After:** Ham & Cheese Roll-Ups w/ Dipping Sauce, Orange Slices, and Bottled Water

The ham and cheese is an American lunch classic. Weiss and Bissex make it over by adding a burst of fiber with the carrots and the whole-wheat flour tortilla and switching to a lean deli ham and reduced-fat cheese to lower saturated fat, calories, and sodium. Plus, roll-ups are fun and easy to make.

To make the roll-ups, spread softened, light cream cheese over an 8-inch whole-wheat flour tortilla. Top with shredded carrots, pre-shredded reduced fat Cheddar cheese and thinly sliced lean deli ham. Roll up tightly and slice in half. Serve with honey mustard, barbecue sauce, or hummus for dipping.

**Before:** Lunchables with Ham, Turkey & Cheddar, Chips Ahoy! Chocolate Chip Cookies and Gatorade  
**After:** Fun Finger Food, Fruit Kabobs, Skim Milk Pudding Cups and Bottled Water

Pre-packaged lunches are convenient, but they aren't the most nutritionally sound choice. It's easy to make your own version of the ever-popular Lunchable. Try cubing or slicing reduced-fat cheese and lean luncheon meat to top whole grain crackers. Add carrot sticks, red and yellow or orange pepper strips and grape

tomatoes. Buy some hummus in a plastic container for dipping. There's no end to the options—you can add a mini applesauce, toasted nuts for more protein, skim milk pudding cups and all natural squeeze yogurt. For dessert, assemble fruit kabobs. Slide seedless grapes, strawberries, pineapple chunks and mini marshmallows onto a bamboo skewer.

Even with these fun ideas, it's easy to settle into "brown bag boredom," packing the same ol' lunches day in and day out. To avoid the rut, talk to your children about what they would like to see in their sack. This can be a great opportunity to teach menu-planning techniques. A sack lunch should include all food groups: a bread; meat or protein; fruit; vegetable; and dairy. Children are more apt to eat a lunch they've helped to make.

If your child needs a little more bulk, or more food for after-school activities, then add in these nutritious, yet yummy side items to their lunch menus.

- Fresh Fruit: It comes in its own wrapper, requires little or no preparation, and is naturally packed with vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, and fiber.
- Mini Applesauce: Look for the all-natural brand and avoid the ones with added sugar and the fake blue, red, or pink coloring.
- Mini Fruit Cups and Bowls: Fruit cups and bowls come in handy when your own fresh fruit bowl is empty. Read labels and choose products packed in fruit juice versus syrup.
- Squeeze Yogurt: Go for the all-natural brands made without artificial colors and flavors.
- Popcorn: Kids love the small bags of Smart Food popcorn and parents should love the fact that popcorn is a whole grain. Look for popcorn without hydrogenated vegetable oils.
- Cheese Sticks: Part-skim mozzarella cheese sticks provide high-quality protein and calcium and only 1 gram of unhealthy saturated fat.
- Pretzels: Choose whole grain or sunflower seed pretzels if available.
- Granola Bars: Look for bars made with healthy canola oil versus hydrogenated vegetable oils. Compare labels and choose the brand with the least amount of sugar and the most fiber.
- Carrots with Dip: Little packets of baby carrots with a ranch dressing dip are fun for kids and help to squeeze a vegetable into the lunchbox.
- Make-Your-Own Trail Mix: Combine mixed nuts, raisins or dried apricots, mini pretzels, sunflower seeds, breakfast cereal such as Chex, and a few chocolate chips into a resealable plastic bag.
- Crackers: Read food labels and look for graham crackers and whole grain crackers without hydrogenated vegetable oils.

The retail world knows...enticing packaging sells, especially when it comes to kids. Unfortunately, what's inside is not always nutritious. Solve this dilemma by making your own fun packaging. Stock up on cheerfully colored reusable containers, fun party napkins, colored plastic wrap, and bright stickers for plastic bags. Surprise your child with a fun, encouraging note from home tucked inside. A healthy lunch will be fun to eat!