



The Value of Lunch for Children

Lunch is an important part of a child's diet. Lunch can help children develop and practice healthy eating habits that lead to good nutrition. Key roles of good nutrition are:

- proper growth and development,
- energy for daily physical activity,
- prevention of childhood and adolescent health problems
- prevention of chronic diseases in later life (heart disease, cancer and stroke).

Children should consume about 25% of their daily nutrient intake at the lunch meal. Eating lunch will provide children with the opportunity to re-energize for the afternoon school session by boosting their energy level and concentration in the classroom. Children who eat lunch will also increase their ability to learn and perform better in school. Skipping lunch can lead to poor performance in many subjects, poor attention in class, inability to concentrate, irritability, and poor nutritional status.



What about some of the “typical” foods that kids are eating for lunch?

Ready made snack packs that come with crackers, lunch meat, and cheese all in the same package contain on average 22 grams of fat, are loaded with salt, and have very little fibre. Any of the pre-made lunch “kits” are about the same - pizza packs, taco packs, nacho packs - all have lots of fat, little fibre, and almost no nutritional value.

Dried packaged oriental noodles are like eating potato chips. Before being packaged, they are deep fried in palm oil, which is rich in artery clogging saturated fat. They also have little fibre, tonnes of salt, and no nutritional value.

Many fruit “drinks” are not a good source of pure fruit juice. Each cup has only a couple of tablespoons of pure fruit juice, and the rest is sugar and water. A product that is called fruit “drink”, “beverage”, or “punch” will contain very little actual fruit juice. Make sure the label says 100% pure fruit juice.

A healthy lunch should be a combination of foods instead of any one particular food. Using Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating, a healthy lunch should consist of:



- **one or more servings** from the **Grain Products Group** (eg: bread, bagel, pasta, rice)
- **at least one serving** from the **Vegetables & Fruit Group** (eg: carrot, V8, apple, banana, fruit salad)
- **one or more servings** from the **Milk Products Group** (eg: milk, yogurt or cheese)
- **at least one serving** from the **Meat & Alternatives Group** (eg: meat, poultry, or fish, beans, eggs nuts)

(Continued on page 6)



Children who eat lunch will also increase their ability to learn and perform better in school.

