

5 SCHOOL LUNCH PACKING TIPS



#1 Find Your Ideal Packing Time

Mornings, at my house, are chaos. My kids are half dressed, doing an art project, our new puppy is chewing on a library book, my hair is going to be pulled into another top knot because there simply isn't enough time to wash it. So the thought of packing healthy school lunches in the morning is completely overwhelming to me. I have found that the best time for me to pack lunches is at night. I put the girl's bento boxes on the counter next to my cutting board, and as I prep for dinner, I will also pack their lunches at the same time. This method works great for me. But if you are a morning person, then maybe packing lunches in the morning while sipping on your matcha tea is the right time for you. Experiment and try different times to see which time of day works best for you and your family.

#2 Plan It Out

Having a meal plan for school lunches is an easy way to make sure you have everything on hand that you will need during the week to make healthy lunches. I usually start by planning our dinners and then seeing if I can use any of those leftovers for the lunches (see tip #4). Then I fill in the blank days with lunches I know my girls already love, something they have asked for or if I am feeling creative a new lunch altogether. A fun way to get your older kids involved is to have them help you plan out their lunches each week. The younger kiddos can help by simply putting a sticker by any lunch they really loved after they get home from school each day. That way you can add that starred lunch to their weekly rotation. I have found that having 4-5 go-to school lunches makes the lunch packing process more manageable. When your school lunch plan is filled out, then add any food items that you don't have in your pantry or fridge onto your shopping list for the week.

#3 Get the Kids Involved

Most kids tend to have an opinion about everything - that they have to wear head-to-toe purple, that there needs to be 4 blankets on them while they sleep or none at all, that they need to bring at least 8 toys with them everywhere they go. So it's no surprise then that they like to have a say on what is packed in their school lunches. While sometimes this seems to be just one more thing to add to your list, it really is a great way to get kids involved in making their own healthy food choices at a young age. For older kids, you can let them pack their own lunches (with a little guidance from you). For younger kids, you can give them a few choices on what to pack in a couple of the compartments in their bento boxes. I will usually just ask my girls questions like "do you want carrots or cucumber in your lunch?" or "do you want apple slices or an orange in your lunch?". They usually get really excited to be part of the process and to know that they are getting exactly what they want.

#4 Use Those Leftovers

Leftovers are key for me not losing my sanity during a busy week. There are two types of leftovers - one type you can reuse as is and the other type of leftovers are those that can be repurposed into other meals. For example - leftovers that can be reused are meals such as a big batch of soup, grain salad, enchiladas, etc. Leftovers that can be repurposed into other meals are items like grilled chicken that can be turned into a chicken salad, made into a quesadilla or used as toppings on a pizza. Both types of leftovers are great to have on hand to use in lunches.

#5 Food Prep

Having a stockpile of your go-to foods on-hand will save you a ton of time during a busy week. The idea is to dedicate a couple of hours during the weekend to peel, dice, chop, bake and prep your go-to school lunch items - carrot sticks, hard boiled eggs, mini muffins, etc. That way, when you are packing your kids school lunches during the week, half (or all) of the food is already ready to get packed.