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Fuel for Learning: Healthy Lunch Ideas

Balanced meals can help blood sugar not only around mealtimes, but across the entire day.

What does a balanced meal look like? A simple approach is to include:

- **A carbohydrate source,** ideally rich in dietary fiber (whole wheat bread, wraps, pasta, pita pockets, brown rice, whole grain crackers, air-popped popcorn, fruit, starchy vegetables)
- **A protein source** (turkey, chicken, ham, eggs, cheese, cottage cheese, yogurt, beans, tofu)
- **A source of dietary fiber** (veggies are a great option!)
- Bonus if you can include a **source of healthy fats** (avocado, almonds, chia seeds)

Examples of balanced school lunches include:

DIY LUNCHABLES: whole grain crackers, turkey or ham slices, cheese cubes or slices, grapes, bell pepper strips

PASTA SALAD: whole wheat pasta with grilled chicken, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, mozzarella cubes, Italian dressing. Served with strawberries.

BURRITO BOWL: ground turkey or beef taco meat, brown rice, black beans, shredded lettuce, shredded cheese, salsa. Served with an orange.

PIZZA: whole wheat English muffin pizza (cheese, veggie or pepperoni), side salad, grapes

CHICKEN SALAD LUNCH: chicken salad, whole grain crackers, cherry tomatoes, peach

IT'S A WRAP: whole wheat tortilla topped with protein (turkey, grilled chicken, tofu), veggies (lettuce, diced tomatoes, or bell pepper strips), cheese (optional), sauce (hummus, guacamole, ranch or mustard). Served with yogurt and apple slices.

With your support, we are creating a movement to improve and change life with T1D, advancing breakthroughs on the way to cures.

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To help prevent blood sugar spikes *avoid eating naked carbs!* In other words, when eating foods that contain carbohydrates, try to pair them with foods that contain protein, dietary fiber, or fat. *Protein, dietary fiber, and fat all slow digestion helping blood sugar rise more gradually and less dramatically.*

Prioritize Nutrition

We are often so focused on using food as a tool to manage our child's T1D, understandably, that we forget the importance of food in helping nourish their growing bodies and supporting cognitive function and academic performance.

Packing balanced school lunches not only supports better diabetes management, but also helps fuel their growing bodies, keeps them satiated throughout the long school day, and enhances attention and performance in school.

Pack Practically

Lunchtime is often very short so try to pack foods that are easy and quick to eat.

Although it's important to encourage youth to try new foods, school lunch is often not an ideal time to do this because it imposes too many unknowns (e.g., will your child like/eat the food? How will their blood sugar respond?). So, stick with healthful foods you know your child enjoys eating.

Think Beyond Sandwiches!

PB&J can get old after a while. Consider trying 'non-traditional' lunches, like the ones mentioned above.

You may want to trial run these beforehand to see if your child likes them (and if not, work together to find a way to tweak the recipe to make it a lunch they will enjoy!) and how their blood sugar responds.

Leftovers from dinner can be a quick and easy option for school lunches too! Just be sure you pack them safely.

Purchasing School Lunch

Although challenging at times, it's important to help your child with T1D not feel 'different' from their peers. So, while purchasing school lunch can induce parental stress, try to make it at least an occasional option for your child.

Plan ahead by reviewing the lunch menu with your child and choosing days to purchase school lunch based on foods they will enjoy and how those choices may affect blood glucose management. The evening before or in the morning, work with your child to estimate the carbohydrate content based on the foods/quantities the child anticipates eating.

'Add-on' foods that are not served as part of the school lunch but can be purchased separately often cause challenges to blood sugar management during the school day. Instead of restricting your child from purchasing/enjoying these foods, discuss T1D-friendly options and try to plan when your child wants to purchase an 'add-on' so it can be accounted for in the estimated carbohydrate content of the lunch.

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