

Healthy Lunchbox Ideas for your Gymnast

By Julie Meek, Sports Dietitian (June 2017)



Kids can be funny little things and despite their size can have very set ideas of what they prefer to eat. This can often present challenges to parents who may struggle with what to prepare for their sporty children that is tasty and nutritious all at the same time. I cringe to think of the 'expert advice' that I gave to parents as a new graduate Dietitian with no children. I remember telling the frustrated mum's to just make them eat their vegetables. Lets just say I was still learning!

Now, with many years experience behind me and three children, I get it.

What your kids eat at lunch (regardless of their age) should prepare them well for an afternoon training session.

Five Top Tips for the Best Lunchbox

1. Think about the best way to keep your child's lunchbox cool

Lunches can be languishing in the school bag for around 4 hours and can be a happy haven for bacteria. Young children don't have fully developed immune systems and are at greater risk of food poisoning. Try a frozen water bottle or yoghurt tub in an insulated bag to help keep lunch fresh.

2. Boost brain function

Choose a bread containing chia seeds. Chia seeds are tiny little things and can be black, white or grey. They are tasteless and slightly crunchy meaning that they can be added to almost anything. Chia seeds are a very good source of omega-3 fats, which are just the ticket for heart health and brain function. Plus they are full of fibre. Some commercial bakeries are already adding them to bread or if you have your own bread maker, toss in a couple of tablespoons to give your kids a brain boost.

3. Make treats do some work

Instead of reaching for the multi-packs of chips and chocolate, make a quick rice custard by adding cooked rice to some prepared custard, freeze it and pop into lunchbox. Great source of energy and calcium and kids love it. Or try some dry cereal like mini-wheats or Fruit Bites, my kids inhale them. If you are a cook, bake a batch of muffins but make them mini to avoid waste and freeze them, grab them when you need and they will be defrosted by the time recess arrives.

4. Make fruit interesting

For some reason kids find peeling fruit or eating a whole piece hard going. Make it easy and interesting by chopping up a mixture of fruit into small pieces and add a drop of 100% juice to stop it going brown. Make the most of delicious summer fruits like stone fruit, grapes and melon. For a double boost mix a handful of frozen berries into some Greek yoghurt and freeze. This is a great snack that will last the distance.

5. Doing the Dairy Dance

Instead of spending your weekly wage on pre-prepared cheese and crackers use a collection of small cookie cutters to make interesting shapes (if this is age appropriate) and partner them up with some plain crackers or twists.

If kids (small and big) are presented with a lunchbox full of delicious food, not only does it make them happy and healthy but ready to hit the gym in the afternoon for a training session.