Simple Lunch Ideas

Homemade meals are the best way to ensure we are nourishing our bodies with the foods we enjoy. And to make choices that help us achieve our health goals. Homemade meals can help us save time in the long run and help save money! There are so many benefits to making it a routine to packing our own lunches -its definitely a good habit to start and keep!

Preparing lunches ourselves and our families can feel like a daunting task when we are not in the practice of doing regularly, and can lead us to more convenient methods, such as purchasing meals. However, trust that prepping lunches can be broken down into simple steps, becomes easier with practice as it becomes part of your daily routine, and actually helps save you time. Keeping it simple is key! Below are a few tips and ideas to help you get started.

Tips to Keep it Simple:

- Minimize variety for the main.
  - That is, aim for the same meal for as many days of the week as possible - ideally for 1 week if you're not too picky about variety for lunches. Change the meal each week.

- Think leftovers!
  - This is the simplest way to prepare lunches, just remember to make extra for supper to take for lunch.

- Get creative with food choices or leftovers.
  - Sometimes its a mesh-mash of items and that's okay! There's no one way to put a meal together.
    - E.g., mini charcuterie: cracker, cheese slices, hummus, sliced roast chicken jerky, handful of nuts, apple slices
- Prep, cook, and freeze.
  - Make extra for supper meals and portion out single serves to store for lunches later.
    - E.g., soups and stews: make extra to portion into single serving sized freezer-friendly containers, label (include date) and freeze for lunches later.

- Pre-prep to build your own meals.
  - Pre-cook your protein, wash, peel, and cut-up veggies & fruits as needed, pre-cook starch/grain if needed, and store all items in containers. Now everything is easy (and takes less time!) to assemble during the week. This is a great option to get a bit of variety.
    - E.g., supper leftovers with pre-cut veggies/fruit.
    - salad with pre-cooked protein and cut-up veggies.
    - sandwich/wrap with pre-cooked protein with veggies and fruit.

- Aim for balance - nutritious AND delicious
  - Choose a good protein choice, include vegetable &/or fruit, and a source of whole grain for a nutrient packed meal.
  - Explore a variety of food to help increase options for both nutritious and delicious food choices!

- Add snacks for variety and 1 treat to keep it fun :)

Below is a list of foods for each food category. Use this to help with creating balanced meals for optimal nutrients - listed in alphabetical order.

Choose foods you enjoy, and aim be open to trying other foods too - to help increase the variety of foods you can enjoy!

Protein	Vegetables	Fruit	Whole Grains
Animal: • beef • bison • block cheese • chicken • cottage cheese • duck • eggs • fish • Greek yogurt • milk • pork • shellfish • turkey • yogurt Plant based: • chia seeds • dried beans (kidney, black, lima, navy, chickpeas, lentils, etc.) • edamame • hemp seeds • nut butters • nuts • soy • tempeh • tofu	• beets • bell peppers • bok choy • broccoli • brussel sprouts • butternut squash • cabbage • carrots • cauliflower • chives • collard greens • corn • cucumbers • eggplant • garlic • green/yellow beans • Kabocha squash • kale • kohlrabi • leeks • lettuce • nappa cabbage • onions • parsnips • peas • potatoes • pumpkin • radishes • rutabaga • scallions/green onions • shallots • spinach • sweet potato • Swiss chard • tomatoes • turnips • zucchini	• apples • apricots • bananas • blackberries • blueberries • cantaloupe • cranberries • goose berries • grapes • hami melon • honeydew • kiwi • mandarin orange • mango • naval orange • nectarines • peaches • pears • plums • pomegranate • raspberries • strawberries • watermelon	• brown rice • barley • cornmeal • farro • Injera (with whole wheat flour) • oatmeal • popcorn • rolled oats • whole grain bread/ bun • whole grain cereal (e.g., Cheerios, All Bran Flakes) • whole grain crackers (e.g., Triscuits) • whole grain pita • whole grain tortilla • whole grain/wheat bannock • whole wheat pasta (mix half & half with regular pasta to help with texture sensitivity) • wild rice • quinoa