

Balance in a Box

Packing a lunch is not only a great way to save money, but also a great way to control what you eat. Whether you are packing lunch for your little one, your spouse or yourself, you don't have to sacrifice taste or health with these delicious lunches.

Nothing beats a hot lunch on a cold day, so investing in good-quality insulated containers will open the door to more options. And planning is the key. Many people plan for the next day's lunch by making extra food at dinner or packing the leftovers from last night's take-out meal.

Having your child participate in the choices and lunch preparation will be the difference between a lunch that is eaten and one that is traded for Hostess Twinkies.

Here are four delicious lunch ideas that will leave them begging for more.

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One for the kids:

Chili is the perfect lunch to take on a cold day. Fritos Scoops, made without chemicals and preservatives, are a great way for kids to scoop the chili out of their thermos. Blending the vegetables in this recipe incorporates them into the chili so they can't be picked out. As a variation, this chili can be served atop whole-wheat pasta. Just store the pasta separately until you are ready to pack the thermos. The hot chili will heat up the pasta.

Organic applesauce topped with a little cinnamon and toasted walnuts is a great balance to the savory flavors of the chili.

Bean & Vegetable Chili

1 15 oz. can organic pinto beans
1 15 oz. can Muir Glen Organic
Diced Tomatoes
Box of either whole-wheat fusilli
or macaroni (optional)
½ cup onions, diced
½ cup carrots, diced
½ cup sweet potato, diced



3/4 cup corn, frozen or fresh
1 Tbsp. Chili powder
2 tsp. cumin
1/4 tsp. cinnamon
2 Tbsp. sesame oil
Sea salt
Water
Scallion, finely sliced for a garnish

In sesame oil, sauté onion with a pinch of sea salt until transparent; add carrots and sauté 1-2 minutes, then sweet potatoes and sauté 1-2 minutes. Stir in chili powder, cumin and the can of tomatoes including the liquid. Fill the tomato can with water and add it to the pot along with 1/2 tsp of sea salt. Cover, bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer for 15 - 20 minutes until vegetables are soft. Puree the chili mixture until most of the veggies are blended. Add the pinto beans, corn and cinnamon. Cook another 5-10 minutes and garnish with finely sliced scallion.

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Flavor, fiber and crunch:

This salad can be served warm or at room temperature. It is loaded with flavor, fiber and plenty of nutrients.

A side of blanched broccoli and red onion drizzled with balsamic vinegar complements this salad nicely. Cooked properly, the broccoli should still have a great crunch. Fall is apple season so bringing one for dessert is perfect.

Mediterranean Brown Rice Salad

1 cup long grain brown basmati rice, uncooked
1 15 oz. can Muir Glen Organic Diced Tomatoes
1/2 onion, diced
1/4 cup sundried tomatoes, sliced into strips
1/2 cup kalamata olives, rinsed and sliced in half
1 tsp. dried oregano
3 Tbsp. olive oil
Fresh Basil, finely sliced as a garnish
Sea salt
1 1/4 cups of water

Rinse and drain the uncooked rice. Heat olive oil and sauté onion with a pinch of sea salt until transparent. Add the rice and sauté until coated with oil. Add the tomatoes along with the liquid plus the additional water and oregano. Cover, bring to a boil and reduce heat and simmer for 45 minutes. Stir in the sundried tomatoes and olives, cover and let stand for 10 -15 minutes until all liquid is absorbed. Garnish with basil.

Broccoli and Red Onion Drizzled with Balsamic Vinegar

½ cup broccoli florets
¼ cup red onion, half moons sliced finely
Water
Sea Salt
Balsamic Vinegar

Bring a pot of water to a boil. Add a pinch of sea salt and drop the florets into the water for 30- 60 seconds, depending on the size of the florets. When the color of the broccoli is the brightest green, remove from pot and drain off the excess water. If you make this the night before, keep the broccoli in the refrigerator. Prior to packing your lunch, slice the onion and drizzle the balsamic vinegar on top.

A Seasonal treat:

Hummus is a blend of chickpeas, tahini (sesame seed paste), lemon and salt. It is creamy and delicious and can be used as a dip for veggies or in a sandwich. It can be purchased now in any grocery store, but this is so easy to make you can whip it up in no time.

Squash is in season right now, so pairing this sandwich with ginger squash soup is not only delicious but complements the hummus nicely. Adding sweet vegetables to your diet, such as squash, helps satisfy a sweet tooth.

Hummus Sandwich:

1 15 oz. can of chickpeas or garbanzo beans
1/2 tsp. sea salt
4 Tbsp. lemon juice, freshly squeezed – approximately one lemon
2 Tbsp. tahini (Sesame seed paste)
¼ - 1 garlic clove, (optional)
1/8-1/4 cup of reserved juice from chickpeas
Romaine Lettuce, chopped

Red onion slices
Cucumber slices
Kalamata olives, rinsed and halved
Whole-wheat pita bread or flatbread

Add the first 5 items to either a food processor or a blender. Gradually add the reserved chickpea juice to the mixture until you get the desired consistency. It should not be too loose or too thick.

Layer the romaine lettuce, hummus, sliced cucumbers, red onion slices and kalamata olives in the whole-wheat pita. If you use whole-wheat flatbread, you can grill it and cut into triangles. Then spread the hummus on top and garnish it with the vegetables.

Ginger Squash Soup

1 cup onion, diced
4 cups of either Butternut, Buttercup, Kabocha or Hubbard squash
5 cups of water
Sea salt
1-2 tsps. of ginger juice, freshly grated
Scallion, finely sliced for a garnish

Layer the onion first, then the squash in a soup pot. Cover with water and add a pinch of sea salt. Bring to a boil without the lid and let boil for 2 minutes. Cover, then simmer about 15 minutes or until veggies are soft. Puree the veggies with either a hand-emersion blender or in a regular blender and return mixture to the soup pot. Add 1/4 -1/2 tsp. sea salt, simmer for 5-7 minutes and taste. If the soup is not sweet enough, add a pinch or two of sea salt and simmer another 5-7 minutes. Salt brings out the sweetness of the squash. If the soup is too thick, add more water to achieve the desired consistency with another pinch of sea salt and cook it in. Grate ginger and squeeze the juice into the soup right at the end. Ladle soup into a thermos and garnish it with scallion.

An Asian affair:

This salad is easy to make and the peanut dressing so satisfying. It can easily be made the night before and ready to pack in the morning. Pairing it with kale chips is a great way to get in your leafy greens – plus, you will feel like you are eating chips.

Asian Noodle Salad

1 8 oz. package of udon noodles (whole wheat or brown rice) or pasta
1½ cup frozen, shelled edamame, blanched
1 cup carrots, matchsticks, blanched
1 cup bok choy, chopped with leaves and stems separated, blanched
Pinch of sea salt
2 Tbsp. toasted sesame seeds
Cilantro, finely sliced as a garnish

Peanut Dressing:

¼ tsp. sea salt
½ cup of smooth peanut butter
¼ cup soy sauce
¼ cup rice wine vinegar
⅓ cup warm water
3 Tbsp. toasted sesame oil
2 tsp. freshly grated ginger juice
1 garlic clove
½ cup cilantro, rinsed

Bring large pot of water to a boil. Add noodles and cook according to the package. If using Udon noodles, drain and rinse 3 times in cold water;

Blanching Veggies

Heat a pot of water and bring to a boil. Add a pinch of sea salt and put the bok choy stems in first for 30 seconds then remove and drain excess water. When water boils again, submerge bok choy leaves in and out of the water; Drain excess water. Allow water to boil again and then blanch the edamame 1- 2 minutes. Blanch the carrots for 30-60 seconds or until the color of the carrots is the brightest;

Let veggies cool before mixing them with the noodles. Add dressing and mix together gently. Garnish with cilantro, sprinkle with toasted sesame seeds. Chill at least ½ hour prior to serving.

Toasting Sesame Seeds:

Rinse sesame seeds and put in a stainless steel skillet. Continuously move the seeds until they turn golden brown. Place in a bowl to let them cool.

Kale Chips

Kale leaves, rinsed and dried with the stem removed

Olive oil

Sea Salt

Parchment Paper

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly brush both sides of the kale leaf with olive oil. Sparingly sprinkle one side with sea salt. Cut kale into bite-size pieces and place them on a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake for 10 minutes until kale is dry but still has a green color.