

# Parent Topics

## Expert Tips For Healthier Kids' Lunches

(NAPSA)—Breakfast has a reputation as the most important meal of the day, but nutritionists say parents should also start paying more attention to lunch. Instilling good eating habits in kids at every meal may be more important than ever. According to the American Obesity Association, there has been a dramatic increase in childhood obesity over the past two decades. Currently, about 15 percent of American kids are considered obese.

Leanne Ely, certified nutrition consultant and author of the “Saving Dinner” book series, says lowering your child’s intake of fat, especially saturated fat, is an important part of making a better lunch. The other key to a healthy lunch is balance; having a decent protein-to-carbohydrate ratio will help kids finish the day with energy to spare.

Ely offers these five lunchtime tips:

- **Wipe Out White Bread.** Breads made with whole grains are better sources of fiber and keep your kids feeling full longer. It’s easy to find whole grain options at grocery stores for everything from bread to crackers to tortillas.

- **Don’t Skimp on Fruit.** Sugary treats cause kids’ energy levels to nose-dive midafternoon. Bananas, sliced apples, peeled oranges and grapes are easy to keep on hand in the refrigerator and travel well in a lunchbox.

- **Keep the Chips Down.** Most kids feel lunch isn’t complete without chips. Baked tortilla chips are a good option, or even better are baked pita chips, which are easy to make at home.



**Cheese is the No. 1 source of saturated fat in our diets. Certified nutrition consultant Leanne Ely recommends replacing high-fat cheese with a soy-based alternative.**

- **Be Choosy About Beverages.** Drinking too much juice can contribute to everything from cavities to childhood obesity. Get your child into the good habit of drinking water.

- **Be Choosier with Cheese.** Cheese is the No. 1 source of saturated fat in most diets. Try swapping out high-fat cheese with a better-for-you option, such as soy-based Veggie Slices. They taste like the real thing so kids will hardly know the difference in their favorite sandwich. The company that makes them also offers Super Stix, a new, lactose-free, mozzarella-flavored snack stick with no saturated fat or cholesterol. Both can be found in the supermarket produce section.

“Making a healthy lunch is something parents can easily teach kids to do for themselves,” explains Ely. “Children who learn to make healthy meals are the kids who learn to make responsible nutrition decisions as they grow up.”