With so much talk lately about healthy and 'clean' eating and more emphasis on the negative effects of high sugar diets I thought it would be timely to share this article I came across recently about what a healthy lunchbox looks like. I found the article quite interesting and it certainly made me think twice about some of the foods I give my little girl and has also made me look at the nutritional information on all packaged foods I purchase. It is quite surprising to see the sugar content in many foods that are often portrayed as 'healthy options'. I hope you too can get something out of this article that has been included in this newsletter, enjoy 😊

Carly Pavy
School Counsellor

WITH a third of a child’s daily food intake consumed at school, it’s worth making sure that parents get the lunch box balance right.

We all lead busy lives, especially parents of school-aged children, and often it’s easier to resort to prepackaged, processed items as a way of saving time. Seeing the contents of the lunch box return home untouched can be disheartening for many parents, let alone children not getting the nutrition they require for optimal growth and development.

On top of this, new research reveals an alarming number of primary school kids heading to school with no breakfast or what parents worry won’t be enough breakfast to power them through a morning. Studies have proven the link between eating a balanced diet and improved cognitive and academic performance. Not receiving the right fuel can contribute to poor mental health and a lower IQ, and cause more disruptions in the classroom. This affects their ability to thrive and learn. What’s more, poor eating habits at a young age are also a key contributor to child obesity and the disease-promoting eating habits that may carry over into adulthood.

The lunch box formula

A nutritionally balanced lunch box has four key components according to Nutrition Australia, which recently updated the Healthy Eating Pyramid.

1. A main item. For longer-lasting energy, include a combination of low-GI (glycaemic index) carbohydrates, such as wholegrain bread; a roll or flat bread; fruit bread; or crackers. Mix them with a protein-based filling to keep busy kids full and at optimal concentration levels for the entire school day. This includes lean meat (poached chicken, roast beef, lean ham, turkey and for example), eggs, legumes or beans, or nut spreads (provided the school does not have a nut-free policy).

2. Fruit or vegetable. Include whole pieces of fruit; chopped, crunchy veggie sticks; canned fruit in natural juice; or a small mix salad for fibre and an array of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

3. A snack. Include a nourishing snack based on a core food to top up energy levels and avoid the afternoon slump. Sensible choices include either a dairy-based snack, such as reduced-fat yoghurt, cheese, plain milk or milk alternatives (such as calcium-fortified soy), or carbohydrate-based foods including grainy crackers, plain popcorn, wholemeal fruit muffin, or protein-rich foods, such as a boiled egg, hummus or canned fish.

4. Drink. For optimal hydration, always include bottled or tap water. Plain milk is also acceptable.

A good lunch box: A balanced variety of nourishing snacks (such as yoghurt, wholegrain crackers and hummus), with fruit and veg and wholegrain wrap with baked leftover chicken.

Source: Supplied
What to avoid

Sugar-sweetened beverages: fruit juices, fruit drinks, cordials, sports drinks, energy drinks, artificially sweetened or flavoured waters, iced teas and soft drinks. These are high in energy (kilojoules) and sugar, and can lead to weight gain and oral health problems in children.

Packaged snacks: cheese and dip snack packs, coated muesli bars, oven-baked savoury biscuits, muffins, rice crackers, crisps and biscuits are often high in salt or fat, along with highly processed carbohydrates, including starch or sugar. Dried fruit straps tend to be low fibre and high in sugar, which can stick to children’s teeth, causing tooth decay.

Processed meat: salami, bacon, pastrami sausages are highly processed and salty. They can also be fatty. Save these for every now and then, rather than packing them every day.

A bad lunch box: Snacks with added sugar and fat, refined carbohydrates (such as bread and crackers) with processed meat and a sugar sweetened beverage. Source: Supplied

Daily lunch box dilemmas solved

Involve the kids. Parents can encourage their kids to eat healthy foods by involving them in packing decisions. Not only does this encourage healthy habits from a young age, it also increases their likelihood to eat those foods, preventing lunch box leftovers.

Be patient. It can take up to 15 times before new foods become familiar and are accepted, so constant exposure is critical. It’s important not to give up as this is key to forming healthy habits that last a lifetime. Make sure the environment is always relaxed and avoid bribes where possible.

Plan ahead. To ensure you get through busy times a little easier, plan in advance what foods to include for the week. This includes cooking a little extra dinner for leftovers, and having enough fruit, vegetables and portion-controlled snacks that are quick to prepare and fun to eat.

Food safety. When packing a school lunch, it is important to consider how the lunch will be kept cool to prevent foods and drinks from spoiling. Include a frozen drink bottle or use an insulated lunch box with an ice brick.

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