



Packing Healthy Peanut/Tree Nut Free Meals for School- FAQ's

At SELA we understand the important role that healthy meals play in a child's life. We have put together some frequently asked questions regarding packing healthy snacks & lunches for students. SELA is a completely Peanut & Tree Nut Free facility. We ask that families do not bring in any nut products, any products that may contain nuts, or any product that is processed in a facility that also processes nuts. Product formulas may change so ALWAYS double check the package to ensure the item is truly peanut/tree nut free.

1. Why are healthy lunches and snacks important at school?

Your child's school lunches and snacks are a major source of the essential vitamins and minerals they need to grow and develop over the years. The foods you pack for your child will give them the energy and nutrients they need to learn and play at school. Without enough energy from food, they may feel tired and find it difficult to concentrate in class. Just like adults, if tasty healthy foods are not available when your child is hungry, the chances that he or she will reach for unhealthy junk food is greater.

2. My children want the same thing to eat every day. How can I introduce some new lunch ideas?

Your child's taste may change from one day to the next. Try new foods regularly and don't be afraid to try them more than once. You may have to offer new foods many times before your children learn to like them! Be sure to offer new foods alongside at least one favorite or "safe" food for your child.

Children experience food using taste, touch and sight. Keep them interested with lunches that include a variety of shapes, colors and textures.

- Cut sandwiches into triangles or diamonds. Use cookie cutters to make fun shapes.
- Change the bread – try different kinds of grains (rye, pumpernickel, flax) as well as the type of bread like whole grain tortillas, bagels and pitas.
- Offer various types of cheese (mozzarella, cheddar, Jack, Swiss) in different forms (cubes, strings, slices and balls). To create a cheese ball, shred and then shape into balls.
- Switch up the veggies and fruit. Give your kids something different to experience with each bite. Group foods according to: Type (citrus, tropical.); color (green, red, orange, yellow, purple); shape (balls, strips, chunks, whole); or texture (soft, juicy, crunchy)
- Kids love to dip. Use cottage cheese, hummus, yogurt, or guacamole as healthy dips.

3. What’s a good approach to building a healthy lunch?

Step one: Think **food groups**. Aim to have at least three or four food groups represented in your child’s lunch. (USDA’s 5 recommended food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, protein and dairy)

Step two: Think outside the sandwich! Get creative when choosing items for your child’s lunch. Sometimes changing something as simple as the type of grain. For example, using pita, flatbread, tortilla, or bagel instead of bread can make a sandwich more interesting for your little eater. You may even want to write up a simple chart to brainstorm different options. Here are some ideas to get you started. Mix and match the options in the different columns to get a variety of lunch meals.

Fruits/Veggies	Grains	Dairy	Protein
Pepper strips	Tortillas, flatbread, or pita bread	Fruit yogurt or soy yogurt	Hardboiled egg
Peas in a pod or snap peas	Cold or hot cereal*	Greek yogurt or ranch dip for veggies	Tuna or chicken salad
Mixed berries	English muffins	Milk or fortified soy beverage*	Ham or turkey slices
Cherry tomatoes (halved)	Oatmeal muffins	Cheese cubes, slices or string cheese	Hummus
Melon balls (halved)	Rice cakes	Milk-based pudding	Refried or baked beans
Fruit smoothie*	Whole grain crackers	Cottage or ricotta cheese cups	Scrambled egg
Turnip or zucchini sticks	Whole grain bagel	Cream cheese	Grilled chicken
Cauliflower and broccoli	Pasta, rice, couscous, quinoa	Cheese-filled pasta (tortellini, ravioli)	Steamed edamame
Sliced mango	Bread sticks	Milk-based soup*	Marinated cooked tofu

** Foods that need to be kept cold or hot can be packed into a thermos to keep the food at a safe temperature. Cold foods can also be stored with an ice pack.*

Sample lunch #1: Pepper strips with hummus dip, and cheese-filled pasta with tomato sauce.

Sample lunch #2: Marinated cooked tofu in a whole wheat tortilla wrap with shredded lettuce and grated carrot. Add a fruit yogurt on the side.

Sample lunch #3: Why not breakfast for lunch? Hot oatmeal in a thermos topped with frozen berries, scrambled egg, and a cold milk or soy beverage.

4. What should I do for snacks?

As you plan snacks, think of them as a “mini meal” that includes two different food groups. Try these simple nutritious snack ideas:

- Whole grain crackers with a cheese stick.

- Fresh cut fruit with a yogurt dip
- Nut-free trail mix. Combine dried fruit with sunflower/pumpkin seeds, and a favorite dry cereal.
- Yogurt tube and small oatmeal muffin
- Cut veggies and cottage cheese

5. How do I involve my child in deciding what to have for lunch and snacks?

- Give them healthy options to pick from - they will be more likely to eat a lunch that they choose.
- Older children can help make sandwiches or stuff pitas, while younger children can place snacks into containers.
- Take your children grocery shopping and let them choose some of their favorite foods like breads, vegetables, fruit and yogurts. Use these shopping trips to help you guide your children in making healthy choices.

Helpful hint: Set aside time in the evening to pack lunches and snacks. You'll be happy you did during the next day's busy morning rush!

6. What are quick & easy snacks that I can grab from the grocery store and have on hand in the pantry without having to worry about preparing something?

There are plenty of readily available and healthy peanut/tree nut free snacks available at grocery stores that are perfect to keep in the pantry and add to your child's lunchbox for an easy snack or lunch. We are happy to provide an extensive list of many popular snack brands and items that do not contain peanuts or tree nuts if requested. Please keep in mind that product formulas may change so ALWAYS double check the package to ensure the item is truly peanut/tree nut free.

7. How should I pack my child's snacks and/or lunch?

First and foremost, glass containers are NOT permitted at SELA for the safety of staff and students. This includes "unbreakable" and/or "shatterproof" containers. SELA asks that parents send lunch and snacks in containers that are clearly labeled with the child's name, as well as what time of day it should be offered (AM/PM snack, lunch- if you have a preference). We recommend that snacks are packed separately from your child's lunch- especially if you are using a Bento-style box for lunch. This will allow students to be more independent during meal times, and ensure that they save enough food for each meal that they have while at school.

8. Aside from peanuts/tree nuts, is there anything else that we are not allowed to send in with children?

Please refrain from sending in candy, soda and anything that is a choking hazard. Tube shaped foods such as hot dogs, baby carrots and string cheese should be cut into short strips rather than round pieces. For infants and toddlers, foods should be cut into ¼ inch cubes. Round foods should be cut into quarters so that the shape is not round. For preschoolers and JuniorK students, foods should be cut into ½ inch pieces. Round foods should be cut in half length wise.

9. My child's food is cold by the time they eat lunch, and they won't eat it. What can I do to prevent this? Does SELA warm up lunches?

Unfortunately, SELA is unable to warm up children's lunches. We recommend either sending in foods that are not meant to be eaten warm (sandwiches/wraps, fruits/veggies, etc.) or sending warm food in a thermos container so that it stays warmer than if it were just in a lunchbox. Here are some that our families have found to work well:



1. OmieBox Bento Box for Kids,
2. Thermos Funtainer 10 Ounce Food Jar,
3. Thermos Foogo Vacuum Insulated Stainless Steel 10-Ounce Food Jar,
4. LunchBots Thermal 8 oz Triple Insulated Food Container

8. Online Resources

<https://www.yummytoddlerfood.com/recipes/lunch/toddler-lunch-ideas-for-daycare/>

<https://www.yummytoddlerfood.com/recipes/lunch/master-list-of-toddler-lunch-ideas/>

<https://www.mylittlemoppet.com/20-healthy-daycare-meal-ideas-for-toddlers/>

<https://themomfriend.com/easy-toddler-lunch-ideas-daycare/>

<https://www.cooksmarts.com/articles/tips-packing-healthy-school-lunch/>

<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/cooking-skills/meal-planning/meal-planning-how-to-pack-a-healthy-school-lunch>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/better/pop-culture/how-pack-healthiest-school-lunch-according-nutritionists-ncna905421>

<https://laurenslatest.com/50-school-lunch-ideas-healthy-easy/>