

# Brown Bag Lunch Articles



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## Brown Bag Lunch Essentials

Brown bag lunches today are not your mother's lunch packing job. For kids, brown bag lunches have gone all modern and flashy. When you offer a brown bag lunch to your kids or other members of the family, here are some essentials to have on hand.

1. The packaging is part of the presentation. Whether you use a brown paper bag or a lunch box, express your own style. A brown paper bag can be decorated with stickers or unique drawings if you are gifted with the talent. Lunch boxes used to be metal and covered with super heroes. Now they are insulated and look like purses or a small camping bag. The lunch bag should fit the style of the carrier.
2. Don't forget the refrigeration. Many offices have refrigerators for their employees. A brown bag lunch can stay in the brown bag when the lunch can be kept cold. It becomes harder to stick with the traditional packaging if you are in school or somewhere that a refrigerator is not accessible. In this case, bring a cold pack to do the job. For any cold pack, store it in the freezer in a leak proof plastic bag. When the cold pack begins to melt, the food is protected from contamination from the pack if it should get punctured. Cold packs are good for several hours each day.
3. Containers prevent cross contamination. Each school child had opened their lunch once and seen a sandwich all soggy with the pink tint of a drink that has opened up. Containers prevent that. Lots of lunch bags come with their own containers that expressly fit in that bag. For ones that do not, buy various sizes of containers with tight fitting lids so even if the lunch bag turns over nothing will be disturbed.
4. Add a note of love. This doesn't just work for kids but adults as well. Opening lunch and finding an encouraging word or two from someone who loves you can make the difference between a good day and a bad day getting worse. Don't worry about kids getting embarrassed. Eventually, their friends will begin looking for notes in their lunches too.

What is essential to complete your brown bag lunch? It could be plastic ware, napkins, or condiments. If the lunch bag has an extra compartment, keep a set of silverware, extra condiments, and wet naps in there for weekly lunch use. Be prepared and you won't be caught without what you need at lunchtime.

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## The Do's and Don'ts of a Brown Bag Lunch

The brown bag lunch represents a gold standard in lunches. This standard was good enough for kids and adults alike for a long time. Brown bag lunches are making their way back into the mainstream. They are economical, practical, and provide a wealth of choices for lunchtime eating.

What is it about the brown bag lunch that we like so much? Is it the convenience that we are attracted to? For this reason, brown bag lunches need to provide a fantastic lunch meal with safety in mind.

Brown bag lunches are traditionally not insulated in any way. Of course if you put an ice pack in the brown bag it will make the bag soggy and your food will fall out. An insulated bag can be substituted but if you want to use paper bags, be sure that the items inside do not need to be refrigerated.

One way to do it is to avoid using mayonnaise. Mayonnaise needs to be kept cold to avoid spoiling. Now, it may not go bad from breakfast to lunchtime but better to be safe than sorry. If the temperature rises on a hot day, the chicken salad sandwich could become the ptomaine treat of the day.

Most people like their sandwiches fresh and tasty. Adding condiments and wet items to a sandwich in the morning can mean soggy wet bread by lunchtime. No one will eat that. Using a sectioned lunch container keeps that from happening. Put the lunchmeat in one section and the bread in another.

A bulk shopping warehouse sells pre-packaged condiments that are perfect for a child's lunch. What they don't use can be shared or kept for another day. It limits waste and illness from condiments gone bad. If kids must have mayonnaise or maybe you do, this is the safest way.

Provide plastic utensils and napkins with lunch. Plastic utensils can be thrown away after lunch. If the sandwich that day is something particularly messy, insert a packaged wet napkin to clean sticky hands.

Fix brown bag lunches the night before. The food inside gets an entire night to stay cold before it goes to school or to work. This is more important for school children because they don't have refrigeration for their lunches. At work, there is probably a refrigerator in the lunchroom.

Protect your lunch with proper refrigeration, avoiding soggy sandwiches, and limiting the amount of items that need to be kept cold. Brown bag lunches can be healthy and fun as long as they are kept safe.

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## Bagged Lunch Food Safety

We look forward to eating lunch. It's a time to catch up with coworkers or friends over a good meal. Whether you have thirty minutes or an hour, follow some safety precautions so that the food you eat won't come back to haunt you.

The first safety issue with food concerns keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Now, with hot foods, they won't stay hot for several hours but an insulated container or Thermos allows for lukewarm or room temperature foods. Even if the food needs to be reheated before eating, it should be room temperature or cool when packed.

Letting food cool down before refrigerating it avoids the excess condensation inside the container. That extra water that builds up inside can make food soggy. On top of that, it doesn't look good when the container is opened and extra water has collected on the food. And, seriously who wants to eat soggy bread?

For frozen meals from the store, there's no need to thaw them out before packing your lunch bag. By the time you get around to eating it, the meal will probably not be frozen anymore. Using a cold pack in the bag also keeps the temperature constant so the meal won't completely thaw before it's time to dig in.

These meals have preservatives so they are not as much of a worry as homemade dishes brought for lunch. Anything with mayonnaise or egg holds up better with refrigeration. A lunch bag left out in the sun or not refrigerated will become rancid over time. That doesn't mean your lunch will be that way if you don't have an ice pack, but you never know what might happen. Taking leftovers for lunch that are a few days old combined with the lack of refrigeration can cause serious problems.

Any food that is not eaten at lunch needs to be refrigerated again if you plan on eating more of it. You should also remove a portion of the meal to a plate or other container when you don't intend to eat it all. Enzymes in saliva break down food and can cause bacteria to spread more rapidly. A half eaten sandwich or plate of meatloaf won't be palatable three hours after lunch unless the portion was divided before you took the first bite.

One final thing - empty the lunch bag when you get home. Kids are great for leaving leftover food in a lunch bag on the top of the refrigerator. Yuck! Clean the bag out in case something spilled in the bottom or there are some food pieces. By following these tips you and your kids can enjoy eating lunch without getting sick.

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## Brown Bag Lunch Sandwiches

At one time, everyone used to bring their lunch to work and to school. I loved to see what everyone else at the table had to contribute. Well, brown bag lunches are about to make a comeback. In light of the economic times, brown bag lunches represent the perfect choice for lunchtime fare.

The main ingredient in a brown bag lunch is the sandwich. Anyone over thirty years of age thinks of a brown bag sandwich as peanut butter and jelly or bologna with cheese. I am glad to say that these are not the only choices anymore.

Brown bag lunch sandwiches have come a long way. Kids want more than the above choices to throw between two slices of bread. They can take their pick between a vegetarian sandwich and one containing any number of lunchmeats. So, let's find out what we can look forward to in a modern brown bag lunch sandwich.

First of all, two slices of white bread are not required anymore. Don't feel pressured to switch if you really like white bread or wheat bread. Tradition is not a bad thing. But, for those who are more adventurous when it comes to eating lunch, here are some suggestions.

Wrap sandwiches have stolen the show for kids. A wrap is basically a flour tortilla. They come in a variety of flavors: tomato, spinach, herb, and wheat. Wraps are sturdy enough that sauces can be added without spillage or sogginess like regular bread. Also, wraps stand up to a lot of ingredients being added.

So, feel comfortable sending you child to school with a chicken salad sandwich in a whole wheat wrap. It is nutritious and easy to handle with small fingers.

On the heels of the wrap sandwich are the pita sandwiches. Pita pockets won over the crowd several years back and have recently made a reappearance and to the liking of the younger crowd. Pita pocket sandwiches provide an alternative to white bread. Give that same old turkey sandwich a kick with lettuce, mayonnaise, and tomato stuffed in a pita pocket.

Other bread sources can also be substituted for regular bread: hoagie rolls, artisan bread, ciabatta bread, and rolls. For carb-conscious parents, using a slice of romaine lettuce in the place of bread provides fewer calories. Adding flavored mayo and other sauces makes up for the lack of taste in the lettuce.

Sandwiches don't have to be ordinary anymore. Create a new look to the main course of lunch time by choosing a variety of breads, meats, and additions. The possibilities are endless and no two days a week have to be the same when it comes to lunch.

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## Brown Bag Lunch Drinks

Nothing finishes off a meal like a refreshing drink. Lunch is no different. Kids used to buy ice cold milk to go along with their brown bag lunch. Milk is good but it doesn't always hit the spot. Keep reading to find out what types of drinks can complement what you pack in your lunch.

Milk is a wholesome drink. Schools offer two percent milk as an alternative to whole milk. Two percent milk also comes in chocolate. Milk provides protein, calcium, and Vitamin D for the body. Cold milk can hit the spot with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or chicken salad.

Water is always a good choice for a refreshing drink. Our bodies are ninety percent water. We always need it especially when we are active. Children are usually active a lot during the day so they can use extra water.

Drinking five to seven glasses of water a day helps to flush impurities out of our system and keep our skin glowing. Kids may not care about the state of their skin, but adults do. Bottled water works well in brown bag lunches. For kids who probably won't drink a sixteen ounce bottle, there are smaller eight and twelve ounce water bottles that fit well in a brown paper bag or an insulated lunch bag.

Many people don't like the taste of water. Depending on where you live it could come from a well or the city supply. Water can still be healthy with a packet of flavoring added to it. Not only does Crystal Light make drink mix sticks, but Kool-Aid and other drink companies also offer flavors to tease and tempt the tongue. Place a different flavoring in their lunch each day.

These drink sticks contain only five or less calories. They are sweetened with artificial sweetener so there is not extra sugar going into their systems. Besides, kids like how they can add the mix and watch the water change colors.

Fruit juices are okay but not every day. Many nutritionists believe that children should be limited to eight ounces of juice a day. And, that juice needs to be 100 percent real juice. Juice adds unnecessary sugar. For the benefit of an apple or an orange, it is better to eat the actual fruit instead of drinking the juice.

Drinks wash down all the food that we eat at lunch. It does an important job for us so why not make it taste good?

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## Healthy Additions for Your Brown Bag Lunches

The best thing about a brown bag lunch is that you create it yourself. Whatever you want to add can be thrown in the brown bag each day. For those who are trying to stay healthy, adding a few extra things to their lunch bag is a necessity.

Brown bag lunches of the past almost always contained a fruit. Moms dropped a shiny red apple or a blemish free orange in the bag. Remember how it used to crush the sandwich in the middle every time? Fruit is now, just as it was then, an essential part of a brown bag lunch. The best part is that now it can be packed without flattening the main course sandwich!

One way to keep from denting your delectable sandwich is to slice the fruit. Apples do turn brown fast so douse them in some lemon juice after you cut the apple to stop the browning process. Kids may look at those apple pieces with a funny expression if they open the container and see brown spots. The chances of them actually eating them decrease so keep them looking good and you're kids are more likely to gobble them up. Oranges don't turn colors but choosing seedless varieties lessens the chance of swallowing a seed and possibly choking.

Other good fruits are raisins, dates, prunes, and dried fruits. Dried fruits are sweeter because the drying process concentrates the natural sugars. Kids will think you added something special and they are getting away with something eating that overly sweet fruit. This will probably get them to eat more of the healthy stuff which is great for you. They don't have to know you didn't sweeten their fruit with unnecessary sugar in order to get them to eat it so you're secret is safe.

Instead of chips, try some pretzels. Hard pretzels aren't just the dark brown twists with salt on top. Pretzels come in sticks, small twists, little nuggets, and a variety of flavors like honey mustard, honey, and cheddar. Even Pringles created a thin crispy pretzel stick that makes an easy to munch snack.

Nuts have always been ostracized because of their fat content. But, as we all know, all fats are not equal and the fat in nuts is good for you. Almonds are good to eat but many people prefer peanuts or pecans. The fat content is higher in those two types of nut, but you don't have to eat an entire container. Fill a bag with a serving or two of nuts and eat them as a snack before or after lunch.

Pudding and applesauce are also a great addition to a brown bag lunch. They can be purchased in pre-packaged portions from the store. These types of snacks provide a sweet treat in specific proportions. You can find these goodies in sugar free forms as well to add to the healthy factor. Jell-O also comes in these types of single serving containers which sure makes it more appealing than the jiggly stuff we used to get in school.

Who says that healthy additions can't be fun or tasty? Once healthy brown bag lunch foods tasted like cardboard; they now have flavors that kids and adults both enjoy.

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## Brown Bag Lunch Sweet Snacks

Snacks are an American tradition, just like apple pie and baseball. After you've eaten all the good stuff in your lunch, it is time to have a sweet treat. Snacks don't even actually have to be sweet, but they are something that we like to eat and they act as a reward for having a healthy lunch.

Brown bag lunches have been home to all types of snacks from lollipops to candy bars to chips and cheese puffs. Now, we aren't advocating eating a bunch of junk food, but a bag of greasy chips every now and then won't hurt anyone. The key is to consume everything in moderation.

So, let's get down to the snacks. The food industry has embraced the idea of making snacks more agreeable with a healthy diet. Even chips have taken on a new tack by baking them and adding spicy flavors to make them taste good.

Nowadays, you can find just about any type of snack in a 100 calorie pack. If you want to taste a few Oreo cookies or some M&M's, one of these packs gives you the taste without adding too many extra calories. Regular and baked chips and crackers come in these types of packs as well.

Candy bars are not a bad choice for a snack. They come in bite size pieces. One piece at lunch won't ruin their appetite at lunch or later on at dinner. That goes for kids and you too. Actually eating a bit of dark chocolate every day provides more benefits for the body than they do fattening calories. Keep in mind that sweets such as these should probably be saved as a special surprise every once in awhile, not every day.

Kids and adults are less likely to overeat when snacks are eaten throughout the day. Try adding a small candy bar, a bag of chips, some popcorn, or other goodies in your brown bag lunches. Bringing a snack means that you won't be tempted to buy anything out of a vending machine, which not only hard on the wallet, but more tempting and harder on the body as well.

Homemade snacks are good because you already know the ingredients inside. Make a batch of brownies, chocolate chip cookies, or muffins and keep them on hand for brown bag lunches. Stores sell plastic snack bags that are the right size for homemade snacks. You can even bake some mini cookies to make the kids think they are getting a ton of good stuff, even though you know it's no more than 2 or 3 of the regular sized cookies.

What are your favorite snacks? Include them in your lunch and your kid's brown bag lunch. Snacking prevents overeating at meal time and it's tasty too. Snacks are essential to a well-rounded brown bag lunch. To save money, buy a value pack of different snacks from the store and dole them out as needed.

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## Alternatives to Brown Bag Lunches at School

What qualifies as a brown bag lunch? Well, it is carried from home to school or work or wherever you intend to go. But, brown bag lunches don't have to contain a sandwich, drink, and a snack to be official. Here are some alternatives to lunch meat and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for your brown bag lunch.

Kids like sandwiches but they also like variety. That variety comes in the form of a new main dish every now and then. The same goes for adults. Some people love to eat the same thing every day for lunch each day of the year, but most would like to tantalize all their taste buds.

Younger kids do well with small things. Food cut up into pieces is more manageable and can be eaten within the time frame of the lunch period in many schools. Kids get thirty to forty minutes to eat but that doesn't include getting to the cafeteria and finding a seat or socializing.

Choose crackers instead of bread. Crackers resist the sogginess that so often plagues a regular loaf bread sandwich. So that there is less mess and more eating, use a cracker to shape the cheese and the lunchmeat into the same size and shape as the cracker. The pieces can be placed in separate sections of a lunch tray or different sandwich bags, but this way makes for quick creation of the stacked crackers.

In chillier weather, sandwiches and crackers may not bring as much comfort as something a bit warmer. Fill a thermos with warm soup. Chicken noodle, tomato soup, vegetable beef, and creamy soups are all good at lunchtime on a cool day. The soup will stay tepid until the child can pour it out and eat it around midday. You can even find a type of thermos that allows your child to drink their soup right from the container, avoiding any mess that might ensue from pouring.

Dinner in my house leaves very little leftovers, however many families find just the opposite is the case in their home. Cooked food left in the refrigerator for three or four days is money down the drain. Use those leftover meals as lunch the next day. Meatloaf and mashed potatoes is a tasty treat for the next day. For a child, a meatloaf sandwich without the potatoes could be better still.

Keep in mind that time for lunch is limited at school so anything that can be eaten cold or at room temperature without using a microwave are favorable choices. Mix a couple of dishes together. If you had spaghetti one night, mix the sauce with macaroni for lunch. Think of some alternatives to sandwiches and jazz up lunch this week.

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## Brown Bag Lunches: Kids Will Love These Ideas & So Will You

For kids, one of the highlights of the school day is eating lunch with friends. That lunch would be better if it were something that they actually wanted to eat. Here are some ideas for packing brown bag lunches kids will gladly carry to school.

Have you seen the old commercial where the kid looks in his lunch bag each morning and frowns, "Tuna fish again?" it's hilarious but exemplifies a true fact - kids are visual. They like variety, especially once they reach a certain age. Satisfy that need with a wide array of choices for sandwiches, snacks, and drinks in their lunch bag.

Remember that kids don't normally have a lot of time to eat. They need a nutritious meal but time is of the essence. Brown bag lunches that provide what they need with very little preparation get a "10" in my book.

Younger kids love finger foods. They can eat a lot, talk, and get stuffed all at the same time. Crackers shaped like nuggets or sticks paired with cheese sticks provide easy to open goodness for any child. Sandwiches cut into four or more pieces let them eat as much or as little as they want.

Older kids appreciate sandwiches. Finger foods probably won't fill their hunger, so a sandwich of some kind impresses them. Wraps, pita sandwiches, soups, and even leftovers make positive lunch options.

Middle or high school kids lack a refrigerator but many school cafeterias will have a microwave. Heating up leftovers is easier for them. Slicing the food into smaller bits requires less microwaving time. Depending on what it is, they might like to eat it at room temperature too.

Adding a fresh fruit salad or a small green salad won't upset your kids. In fact, baby carrots, broccoli, and cucumbers dipped in ranch dressing appeals to most children. Fruit can be eaten with fingers and shared with friends. Add a cup of peanut butter for dipping and they'll be even more pleased. Good nutrition is important for everyone.

What else do kids like? The snack included in a brown bag lunch complements the sandwich. For example, since a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is already sweet, choose a bag of pretzels or another salty snack. Mixing flavors allows each one to be tasted individually. It's like when you eat a donut and drink coffee. The coffee doesn't taste as sweet after a bite of donut.

Kids are not so hard to please as long as you let them sample a variety of foods. This way, they get used to healthy foods as well as a few sweets every now and again. Opportunity for mixing and matching abound when you prepare brown bag lunches for your kids. Experiment with various items to find the perfect lunches that your kids will love.

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## Brown Bag Lunches for Adults

With the cost of living as high as it has become, we all need to watch our spending habits. One of the expenses that we need to watch is how much money we spend each day on food. At work, it's fashionable to eat out with the group at least a few times a week. The trouble comes when we tally the monthly lunch bill and find we've spent fifty to seventy-five dollars in one month on those "fashionable" lunch outings. Imagine how that money adds up and what you could spend it on that would last longer than the meals we are eating. Taking our lunch to work more often would definitely save some of that money, right? Here are some brown bag lunch ideas for adults that will help save money and provide a delicious meal.

Whether you work in an office, a school, a hospital, or some other trade, lunch time can vary from day to day. Maybe everyone wants to go at noon but you can't go until one o'clock. What do you do? The easiest thing would be to pack your own lunch.

Eating out every once in a while is okay, but the choices are mostly the same. When lunch comes from home, it can include whatever you want or desire to eat each day. The possibilities are endless when you think about it.

Adults want something more than sandwiches, chips, and a soda. With big and small lunch bags, a person has the choice to pack as little or as much as they want or need. Maybe you work twelve hour shifts. During that time you would eat two meals and a couple of snacks versus someone who only works 8 hours a day and only needs one meal and snack food. Keep things like this in mind when planning your lunch each day.

Lunch bag containers come in many sizes. They even make salad containers that have a compartment for the dressing. This eliminates the need to lug the entire bottle to work or pour the dressing on the salad in the morning. Adults can bring leftovers like pasta salad, fettuccine alfredo, and pork loin with crunchy vegetables and have it taste just as good as it did the first time.

With a brown bag lunch, we can create our favorite meals but with less fat and calories than the original. When you eat out, who knows what ingredients went into that meal. At home, you can make beef stroganoff is with fat free sour cream and lean cuts of beef along with egg noodles to have a lunch just as yummy as the one you would order at a restaurant, but healthier. Someone can feel good about eating a brown bag lunch when nothing is a mystery about the food.

Snacks can be fancy in an adult brown bag lunch. Instead of pudding, how about dishing up some apple cobbler? Homemade cobbler with fresh fruit tastes much better than store bought frozen alternatives. Instant pudding made with low fat or fat free milk has fewer calories than store pudding.

Don't be afraid to experiment with the brown bag lunch. What you want is flavor and something exciting to eat. When you fix lunch at home, what you get is exactly what you want.

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