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Lunches made

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By ALANA LISTOE Independent Record | Posted: Wednesday, August 26, 2009 12:20 am | (0) Comments

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Maria Hurlbert sends a note in her boys' lunch boxes everyday hoping it will give them a "warm fuzzy."



Maria Hurlbert packs lunches for her two school-aged sons almost every day. There is no hot-lunch program at St. Andrew School, where both boys are students. But even if the school did have a kitchen that provided meals, Hurlbert said she would still send them to school with a sack lunch.

"I would still pack them because one: I have picky children, and two: I like to know everything is healthy," Hurlbert said. "I can also monitor how much they eat."

As school begins this week many families scramble to pull together easy but healthy lunches and snacks, but there are many ways to make brown-bag lunches more appealing to kids.

Hurlbert's menu isn't all that out of the ordinary, except for the love notes she writes everyday to encourage her boys and make them smile.

"I miss them and I like to picture giving them a warm fuzzy," she said.

Michael, 6, and Joseph, 8, usually get a sandwich, fruit, a veggie, a treat like homemade cookies or banana bread and a water bottle (juice boxes on Fridays for an extra treat). She also sends a snack for morning recess that's typically a granola bar, Wheat Thins or Goldfish.

Some parents let their children pack their own lunches. It gives the kids ownership, and they only chose foods they like. And taking them to the store to pick out their own ingredients can be a fun way to teach them about nutritious choices.

Another idea to make sack lunches more appealing is to create lunch themes. For instance, an orange-day theme could include a cheese sandwich, orange slices, an apricot fruit roll-up and peach yogurt.

If sandwiches are the staple lunchtime dish, try using cookie cutters to make fun shapes out of the bread.

But steering away from cold sandwiches can help spruce up any lunch. One suggestion is to send hot food in a thermos. If heated enough in the morning, the food should stay warm until lunch. Soups are the obvious meal to fill the thermos, but another suggestion is chicken or turkey fingers.

Children love dips. Dressing for meats and veggies are great, but also try yogurt to accompany fruit.

One fun snack with many variations is "bugs on a log." This old favorite includes filling celery sticks with peanut butter or cream cheese and then topping it off with raisins.

Food for growing children is critical and no matter how lunches are assembled, health professionals say to stay clear of prepackaged, high-sugar snacks since the nutrition is next to nil and won't do them any good during the school day.

Jennifer Colegrove, dietitian at St. Peter's Hospital, said families should aim to create a balanced meal when packing lunches that include all five food groups vegetable, fruit, grain, protein, and milk or yogurt.

"Make sure they aren't fooled with thinking that fruit snacks or juice boxes can fulfill the fruit food group," Colegrove said. She also advised that lunches shouldn't be filled with chips and cookies.

"They don't offer a lot of nutritional value, especially if they are taking the place of the fruit or vegetable group," Colegrove said.

Here is a snack recipe from Family Fun Magazine that is not only healthy, but has a good shelf life.

Sticks and Stones:

4 tablespoons of butter

¼ cup frozen orange juice or apple juice concentrate

¼ cup brown sugar

2 teaspoons of cinnamon

3 cups of oatmeal cereal squares

2 cups of pretzels

1 ½ cup of almonds

1 cup of raisins or dried cranberries

Heat the oven to 300 degrees. Place the butter, juice concentrate and sugar in a large, microwave-safe bowl and microwave on high for 45 seconds to melt the butter. Stir in the cinnamon. Spread the oatmeal squares, pretzels and almonds in a single layer on a baking sheet. Toss the pieces with the melted-butter mixture to coat. Bake the mix, stirring the pieces every 10 minutes, until the mixture is

dry to the touch and the nuts are lightly toasted, about 30 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven, and then stir in the dried fruit. Let the mix cool completely before storing it in an airtight container. Makes about 7 cups.

Because nutritionists say breakfast is the most important meal of the day, here's an easy breakfast muffin recipe from the Keri Fisher collection at Culinate.com.

Frog in a Bog

1 1/2 cups all purpose flour

1 cup cornmeal

2 tsp. baking powder

1 tsp. salt

1 stick (1/2 cup) unsalted butter, softened

1/4 cup light brown sugar

1 cup milk

2 large eggs

1 cup frozen corn, thawed

12 oz. turkey sausage, cut into 12 equal pieces

Preheat oven to 375 degrees and grease (or line with paper cups) a 12-cup muffin tin. In a medium bowl, combine the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, and salt.

In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the butter and light brown sugar and mix 1 minute or until light and fluffy. Add the milk, eggs, and corn, and mix on low speed until combined. Slowly add the flour mixture and mix until just combined.

Spoon mixture into prepared muffin tin and press a piece of sausage into the center of each muffin. Bake 15 to 20 minutes, or until the muffins are golden-brown and a toothpick inserted into their centers comes out clean. Let cool slightly before serving.

If there are any leftover muffins, wrap them well in plastic and refrigerate up to three days.

If you use fresh sausage rather than precooked, you'll have to cook the sausage before adding it to the muffin batter.

Large turkey sausage works better than breakfast links, but either kind will do; if using smaller links simply press several smaller pieces into each muffin.

This recipe also works with hot dogs; simply cut four hot dogs into 1-inch pieces and press them into each muffin.

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