

TOP TIPS FOR PACKING A TASTY AND NUTRITIOUS LUNCHBOX FOR WORK

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South Africa will be celebrating National Nutrition Week from the 9th to the 15th of October. The theme for the past two years has been to “Portion with Caution” and this year they will be focussing on “Healthy choices in the workplace”. In line with that we thought we’d write an article on a topic which mostly people struggle with: packing a healthy lunch box that you actually want to eat at work.

I have several memories of my school days where I’d wake up 20 minutes before we leave for school, leaving me scrambling to make a dry peanut butter sandwich. By the time it was break-time it would be crumpled up into a ball, leaving me with no other choice but to force it down or go buy something from the tuck shop. When I started studying and working I started packing myself a decent lunch box, one which I’d actually look forward to enjoying. So in my experience, in an effort to be healthier and to maintain healthy energy and blood sugar levels, here are my top tips for packing a healthy and yummy lunchbox.

1. Get equipped

Tip number one, get prepared! Buy Tupperware in all different shapes and sizes so that by lunch-time your food isn’t deformed like my peanut butter sandwich ball. Think about the types of foods and snacks you’d like to pack (which we’ll discuss further down) and then look for suitable Tupperware. For example, if you like to pack sandwiches then buy a Tupperware that’ll perfectly fit a sandwich so that it doesn’t move around too much and deconstruct. You will also need to buy a cooler bag lunch box to pack all your goodies in. Make sure that it’s foil-lined, big enough and practical. You could also invest in some other useful goodies such as:

- Slim line ice packs (also available from Woolworths)
- Reusable wooden cutlery (available from Woolworths)
- Hand sanitizer and wipes
- Aluminium water bottle (it’ll keep water cold for longer, it’s safer and more durable)
- Where to buy awesome lunch boxes:



2. Start planning

Try to plan your meals in advance for the whole week, it will not only make your lunch time's easier but your entire week and it will without a doubt save you money if you do it well. You can do this over the weekends and plan which meals you'd like to prepare while keeping in mind your weekly schedule and the time you'll have to prepare. You could then also use time over the weekend or a Monday to do some batch cooking which can be used throughout the week and then you can also plan when you'll have leftover's to use for your lunch box. Also think of the snacks you'd like to pack in your lunch box and the meals you'd like to make on the days you don't take leftovers.

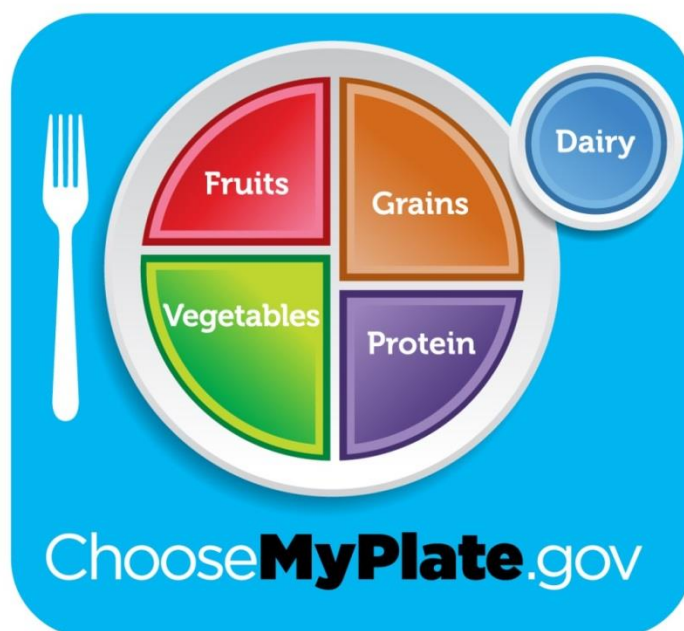
3. Go shopping!

Once you've worked out your meal plan for the week and the meals you'd like to make and the snacks you want to pack, you can create a shopping list of all the ingredients and foods you'll need to buy. This avoids you buying food unnecessarily, food wastage and wasting money. Buying certain food and NOT buying other foods, assists in making healthier food choices at home and at work a lot easier. In other words, if you have healthy food in your pantry and lunch box then you'll eat healthy food and vice versa.

4. Balance it out

When planning your meals and lunch boxes for the week, keep in mind that you want to keep it nutritionally balanced. So you can follow the picture below which shows you how to distribute the different food groups. Some examples of each food group:

- **Fruit:** fresh apples, banana, strawberries, grapes, watermelon cubed etc.
- **Vegetables:** carrot/cucumber/bell pepper/ celery sticks, salad veggies (cherry tomatoes, lettuce etc.)
- **Grains or starches:** wraps, whole-wheat or low GI bread, whole-wheat wraps, brown rice, couscous, brown pasta, quinoa etc.
- **Protein:** grilled chicken strips, cheese, boiled egg, tuna, steak strips, feta.
- **Dairy:** yogurt, milk, milkshake, drinking yogurt.
- **Fat:** which isn't displayed on the picture but still an essential part of a lunch box: homemade salad dressing with healthy oil such as olive or avocado oil, nuts, seeds, lite mayonnaise.



5. Meal preparation 101

When preparing meals, try to prepare meals so that they will stay fresh by the time you want to eat it at lunch time:

- Use whole cherry tomatoes because the water in cut up tomatoes will make other foods go soggy
- Dry leaves very well so that they don't make other food items go soggy
- Only put salad dressing on as you're about to eat to also prevent sogginess
- Wrap sandwiches and wraps in wax paper to keep them fresh
- Using a lot of salt will also cause food to go soggy as salt draws out water

6. Pack enough

Make sure you pack enough food to sustain you throughout the day. Each person is different but generally speaking it is best to eat a small meal every 2-3 hours so you will want to pack a mid-morning snack, your lunch and an afternoon snack and perhaps something to sip on during the day such as diluted fruit juice, herbal tea, coffee, infused water etc. If you don't pack enough food you may find that you'll end up buying unhealthy food from the work canteen or tuck shop anyway.

7. Healthy snack ideas

- Fresh fruit
- Chopped up fruit
- Drinking yogurt (homemade so that you control how much sugar goes in)
- Finger food (chicken strips, veggie sticks) & dips (hummus, cottage cheese, guacamole)
- Fruit, nuts, granola or high protein snack bars
- Diluted 100% fruit juice (dilute in a ratio of 1:4 to 1:2, depending on your preference)
- Cheese blocks or wedges
- Mixed nuts, raw or dry roasted (unsalted)
- Lean biltong & biltong sticks
- Whole-wheat crackers with spread (Provita's with peanut butter, cottage cheese, hummus or tahini)
- FUTURELIFE® SmartBars (High Protein, High Protein LITE, High Energy)
- FUTURELIFE® shake or smoothie. You can find recipes here:
<http://www.futurelife.co.za/recipes/>

REFERENCES

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

<http://www.gov.za/national-nutrition-week-2015>

<http://www.yuppiechef.com/spatula/10-tips-for-healthy-office-lunches/?gclid=CMC1jcrny8cCFRQTGwodAFcDqg>

Shop here: <http://superbalist.com/apartment/wine-dine/kitchen/healthy-snacks-lunch-box/45376?gclid=ClyetoDqy8cCFYUSwwodjtwMIQ&gclsrc=aw.ds>

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