

The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

So many parents spend all summer wishing for September and back to school, but while the dog days of summer may sometimes seem long... the years are short, and here we are again with another school year upon us. Back to school means stocking up on school supplies, evenings spent helping your kids with the dreaded homework and coming up with creative healthy ways to make brown bag lunches more exciting. It can be tricky, especially if you have kids with sensitivities and food allergies. It is also tough to balance: convenience, portability, health, and, of course, taste. This year make sure your child's lunch goes straight into their stomach and not in the trash or up on the trading block. Keep the focus on fun and create meals that are healthy and cost effective. Start your kid's school year off right with these sure to please healthy lunchtime tips.



Think outside the Lunchbox. There is no rule that lunch has to include a sandwich...

Wraps made from whole wheat tortillas, containing either lean chicken or turkey (Nitrate free) or low fat cheese topped with veggies is a great alternative to the traditional sandwich. They're a great option because they're low in calories and high in fiber.

If you are a parent of school aged kids you are probably no stranger to brown bananas. Instead, apples are a great alternative. Slice the apple; dunk it in pineapple or lemon juice to keep it from going brown. For a sweet twist sprinkle with cinnamon or pack some yogurt as a dip. Sugar free applesauce is also always an easy healthy option.

It is important to include a good source of protein because protein will keep kids feeling full longer. Protein also provides energy in the form of calories. In other words, it will help them optimize their learning potential and maintain their energy levels to play their favorite sports at recess. A sliced hardboiled egg, cheese sticks, a cheese round, cream cheese on crackers, or yogurt are all healthy and convenient sources of protein. Meat products are an excellent source of complete proteins. However Deli meats contain preservatives, nitrates, and are extremely high in sodium. Some even contain gluten and sugar! Your best bet is to make a little extra meat at dinner, slice it up and use it in a sandwich the next day.

Try switching it up by adding carbs like crackers, pretzels, whole grain nacho chips, Naan or pita bread... kids are more likely to eat anything with dip, try mustard, salsa, guacamole, hummus, bean dip, fruit dip, light ranch dressing, spinach dip or honey. Get creative!

Homemade trail mix made with cereal, pretzels, dried fruits, seeds (nuts optional) and a few chocolate morsels is a quick healthy alternative to any prepackaged snack. (I make mine with dark chocolate covered organic blueberries)

Drinks made from water with a splash of pure cranberry, peach, pineapple, grape juice etc. are a much healthier choice than traditional juice cocktails and pop. Excess consumption of pure sugar laden drinks can increase the risk of obesity in children. This is also a much better choice economically than the prepackaged drinks.

Though you might be tempted by their convenience and kid friendly sizes, avoid prepackaged processed foods. They are **expensive** and loaded with sodium and preservatives.

We all know one thing that never falls victim to the lunchbox swap: dessert. These oatmeal chocolate chip cookies have the familiar flavors of brown sugar and chocolate, but get a sophisticated twist from tahini (sesame paste). Tahini helps to lower the saturated fat by more than 66 percent while adding a nutty flavor to an old classic.

Makes: About 45 cookies

Ingredients

- 2 cups rolled oats, (not quick-cooking)
- 1/2 cup whole-wheat pastry flour, (see Ingredient Note)
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup tahini, (see Ingredient Note)
- 4 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into pieces
- 2/3 cup granulated sugar
- 2/3 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 large egg white
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup semisweet or bittersweet chocolate chips
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts

Preparation

1. Position racks in upper and lower thirds of oven; preheat to 350°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Whisk oats, whole-wheat flour, all-purpose flour, cinnamon, baking soda and salt in a medium bowl. Beat tahini and butter in a large bowl with an electric mixer until blended into a paste. Add granulated sugar and brown sugar; continue beating until well combined. (the mixture will still be a little grainy). Beat in egg, then egg white, then vanilla. Stir in the oat mixture with a wooden spoon until just moistened. Stir in chocolate chips and walnuts.
3. With damp hands, roll 1 tablespoon of the batter into a ball, place it on a prepared baking sheet and flatten it until squat, but

don't let the sides crack. Continue with the remaining batter, spacing the flattened balls 2 inches apart.

4. Bake the cookies until golden brown, about 16 minutes, switching the pans back to front and top to bottom halfway through. Cool on the pans for 2 minutes, then transfer the cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

While homemade is the best choice it isn't always an option for busy families. So when the options and time are limited and we're faced with trying to find a healthy prepackaged snack alternative try Lucy's organic Oatmeal Cookies, it's hard to believe that these crunchy baked treats can be so perfectly spicy-sweet, since they're free of most allergens, including nuts, dairy, eggs, wheat, and gluten, They are also low in calories and saturated fat. Everyone knows that cookies are guaranteed to bring a sweet smile when the lunch bell rings.

Making lunch every day of the school year can be tiresome for parents, so remember to mix up your menus and keep trying out fresh new ideas. **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.**

Kerriane Brown

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