

Healthy Brown Bag Lunches

Are you one to pack your lunch every day or do you find yourself relying on vending machines and fast food? When we eat out, we tend to take in more calories, **unhealthy fats**, and sodium than when we eat at home. But when you pack your lunch, you have 100% control over your meal.

Taking a homemade lunch to work or school is an easy step toward a healthier lifestyle. But you should still be aware of your food choices and portions when packing your own lunch. Check out the sample homemade lunch below, and then see how you can make some quick nutrition fixes for a more nutritious meal.

Original Lunch

1 sandwich made with:

- 2 pieces of country white bread
- 2 ounces of salami
- 1 slice of provolone cheese
- lettuce
- 2 tablespoons mayo
- 1 teaspoon of mustard

1-ounce bag of potato chips

2 small chocolate chip cookies

12-ounce can of regular soda

Nutrition information: 1040 calories, 108 grams of carbohydrate, 17 grams saturated fat, 1700 mg of sodium, and just 4 grams of fiber.

Some Easy Nutrition Fixes

Can you think of a few easy ways to improve this meal? Here are some quick nutrition fixes that you could start with:

On the sandwich:

- Substitute the white bread with 100% whole wheat bread for more fiber. If you want less carbs, choose a low-carb bread or try an open-faced sandwich.
- Choose a meat that is leaner and less processed than salami like roast beef, grilled chicken breast, or lean roasted turkey. When buying deli meats, choose reduced-sodium varieties.
- Try reduced-fat cheese to cut down on saturated fat. You can also skip the cheese all together and add more veggies like tomato, cucumber, shredded carrots, or bell pepper slices. You could also add some avocado which is a good source of heart-healthy fats.
- Switch to light mayo which is half the calories. Or, you can skip the mayo and just enjoy the mustard. Mustard is a very low-calorie condiment whereas regular mayo has almost 100 calories per tablespoon.

For the sides:

- Instead of chips, try a small handful of unsalted nuts, ½ cup of bean salad, or some carrots and hummus.
- Instead of cookies, try a serving of fruit to curb your sweet tooth.
- Remember it's best to skip the sugary drinks like soda, fruit punch, and lemonade. Instead, get in the habit of carrying a reusable water bottle with you and drink water throughout the day to stay hydrated. You could also opt for unsweetened iced tea or even diet soda to replace the regular soda at lunch.

Meal Makeover:

1 open-faced sandwich made with:

- 1 piece of 100% whole wheat bread, toasted
- 2 ounces rotisserie chicken breast
- 3 slices avocado
- 2 tomato slices
- Lettuce
- a squirt of mustard

10 baby carrots

2 tablespoons hummus

1 fresh peach

You can have all this for a much more reasonable: 390 calories, 49 grams of carbohydrate, 2 grams saturated fat, 565 mg of sodium, and 12 grams of fiber!

More Mouth-Watering Lunch Ideas

Lunch can be so much more than just a peanut butter sandwich every day! Take a look at some of the sample menus below, and make lunch a meal to look forward to.

Menu #1: Pack yourself a [Mediterranean Turkey Wrap](#) along with 2/3 cup red grapes, and 8 fluid ounces of unsweetened iced tea. To cut down on the carbs in this meal, you could use a low-carb tortilla wrap.

Mediterranean Turkey Wrap



Don't waste your money on fast food at lunch. Make this quick wrap instead and you will see that healthy eating does not have to be bland or boring!

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size: 1 wrap

- Calories 285
- Carbohydrate 28 g
- Protein 36 g
- Fat 7.0 g
- Saturated Fat 1.6 g

- Sugars 5 g
- Dietary Fiber 11 g
- Cholesterol 55 mg
- Sodium 605 mg
- Potassium 565 mg

This Recipe Serves 4

Ingredients

8 tablespoons hummus

4 whole-wheat wraps, heated

12 ounces no-salt added, deli-style turkey
½ large cucumber, peeled and diced (about 1 cup)
2 roma tomatoes, diced (about 1 cup)
¼ cup reduced-fat, crumbled feta cheese
4 green olives, diced

Instructions

1. Spread 2 tablespoons hummus on wrap. Top with 3 ounces turkey, ¼ cup cucumber, ¼ cup tomatoes, 1 tablespoon feta cheese and 1 diced olive. Fold wrap to close.
2. Repeat procedure for remaining 3 wraps.

Menu #2: Try ½ cup of our [Tuna Salad with Chickpeas](#) served on top of 5 whole wheat crackers. Have it with 10 dry roasted unsalted almonds, 10 baby carrots, and 2 tablespoons hummus. Whip up the tuna salad the night before in just 10 minutes. Then, pack it in individual containers for yourself and the rest of the family to enjoy for lunch the next day.

Tuna Salad with Chickpeas



This Tuna Salad with Chickpeas is full of flavor and crunch. It is made lighter by mixing fat-free plain yogurt and light mayonnaise - you'll be surprised that you can't taste the difference.

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size: 1/2 cup

- Calories 125
- Carbohydrate 10 g
- Protein 15 g
- Fat 3 g

- Saturated Fat 0.5 g
- Dietary Fiber 3 g
- Cholesterol 25 mg
- Sodium 335 mg

This Recipe Serves 7

Ingredients

3 Tbsp fat-free plain yogurt
¼ cup light mayonnaise
1/2 lemon, juiced
1/2 large red pepper, diced
2 medium celery stalks, diced
¼ cup onion, finely diced
1 cup canned garbanzo (chickpeas) beans, rinsed and drained
2 6.4-ounce flavor fresh chunk tuna pouches, in water
¼ tsp ground black pepper

Instructions

1. In a small bowl, whisk together yogurt, mayonnaise and lemon juice.
2. In a medium bowl, combine remaining ingredients. Pour mayonnaise mixture over tuna and mix well.
3. Serve tuna salad on your whole-choice of lettuce, whole-wheat bread or crackers.

Menu #3: Have ½ cup of **Creamy Chicken Apple Salad** served over 1 ½ cups of spinach or mixed greens. Add a banana or another serving of fruit as a side.

Creamy Chicken Apple Salad



This salad is packed full of good nutrition with protein from chicken, fiber from the apple and healthy fat from the walnuts. Full of flavor and crunch - you won't believe how easy it is!

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size: 1/2 cup

- Calories 115
- Carbohydrate 6 g
- Protein 12 g
- Fat 5 g
- Saturated Fat 0.8 g
- Dietary Fiber 1 g
- Cholesterol 30 mg
- Sodium 115 mg

This Recipe Serves 8

Ingredients

2 cups cooked chicken breast, chopped
2 stalks celery, diced
2 green onions, chopped
1 medium Jonagold apple, finely diced
3 tablespoons walnuts, chopped
¼ cup light mayonnaise
¼ cup plain, fat-free yogurt
½ lemon, juiced
1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper

Instructions

1. In a medium bowl, combine the chicken, celery, green onions, apple, and walnuts
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the mayonnaise, yogurt, lemon juice and pepper. Pour over the chicken mixture and gently stir to coat.
3. Serve salad over your choice of lettuce leaves, bread or crackers.

Menu #4: Pack ½ cup of **Tomato, Mozzarella and Chickpea Salad** in a plastic container. Add an orange and a small whole wheat roll on the side topped with 1 tablespoon trans free margarine for a filling and tasty vegetarian meal!

Mozzarella, Tomato and Chickpea Salad



This salad takes just 5 minutes to prepare and is packed with nutrients. It makes a colorful side dish or you can serve it as a light entrée for lunch or dinner.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size: 1/2 cup

- Calories 155
- Carbohydrate 16 g
- Protein 10 g
- Fat 7 g
- Saturated Fat 2.3 g
- Dietary Fiber 5 g
- Cholesterol 5 mg
- Sodium 165 mg

This Recipe Serves 4

Ingredients

2.5 ounces fresh mozzarella balls, drained
1 cup cherry tomatoes
1 cup no-salt-added canned chickpeas
2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt, to taste
Freshly ground pepper, to taste
12 ounces fresh baby spinach

Instructions

1. Combine mozzarella balls, tomatoes, and chickpeas in a medium bowl. Add olive oil. Stir, taste, and add salt and pepper to taste.
2. Wash spinach, and layer it in the bottom of a serving bowl. Arrange 1/2 cup of mozzarella-tomato-chickpea mixture on top of spinach. Serve at room temperature.

Menu #5: Make a pot of **Veggie Chili** on the weekend and have it for lunch throughout the week. Pack a 1-cup serving in a thermos for lunch. After reheating it, top it with 1 tablespoon non-fat plain Greek yogurt and ¼ cup diced avocado, and add a small apple on the side.

Veggie Chili



The beans and veggies in this dish make it a great source of fiber with 10 grams per cup. The recipe makes 8 servings, so save leftovers for a delicious lunch the next day.

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size: 1 Cup

- Calories 179
- Carbohydrate 33 g
- Protein 9 g
- Fat 3 g
- Saturated Fat 0 g
- Dietary Fiber 10 g
- Cholesterol 0 mg
- Sodium 492 mg

This Recipe Serves 8

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 4 carrots, sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 zucchini, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1, 16-ounce can kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 1, 16-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1, 15-ounce can tomato sauce
- 2, 14.5-ounce cans no-salt-added diced tomatoes in juice

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a large soup pot over medium-high heat.
2. Add onion and carrots and sauté 5 minutes. Add green pepper and zucchini and sauté another 2 minutes.
3. Add garlic and sauté 30 seconds. Add chili powder and all remaining ingredients; bring to a boil.
4. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 30-35 minutes or until the vegetables are tender.

Recipes from: choosemyplate.gov, diabetes.org, and whatscooking.usda.gov