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How to Pack the Perfect School Lunch

Peanut butter and jelly, tuna fish, bologna, apples, cookies, juice boxes? What to pack for lunch? Millions of parents face the task of preparing school lunches for their children everyday. The challenge is to find a menu that is portable, easy to prepare, and is also appealing to kids. But how can parents strike the right balance and prevent their carefully prepared lunches from being traded or tossed?

The experts at coolschoolu.com suggest the following tips for putting together lunches that please both parent and child:

- Parents can make a game of choosing the lunch menu by creating index cards with the names of different lunch foods on one side and pictures of the food groups on the other. The kids can choose a card from each group when it comes time to plan a lunch. They can also have fun decorating the cards.
- Involve the kids in the lunch-packing process. They will be more inclined to eat what is in the bag if they have helped to pack it themselves. Take the kids to the grocery store and allow them to choose some fun snacks to go along with the typical sandwiches and fruit. One fun idea for lunches is the new potato sticks in individual serving sized pouches. Convenient and shelf-stable, potato sticks are an easy way to add a treat to your child's lunch.
- Get your kids excited about vegetables by taking them to a farmer's market or the grocery store and checking out the less well-known fruits and vegetables. Kids may become interested in researching the parts of the world from which different vegetables originate. They should also be encouraged to help plant and care for the family garden. Vegetables such as tomatoes, radishes and carrots are good for school lunches and easy to grow.
- Remember food safety: Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. If your child's lunch will be unrefrigerated, avoid eggs, yogurt, meat and mayonnaise. Have a supply of shelf-stable foods available such as crackers, pudding or serving sized packages of potato sticks. A frozen juice box or bottle of water will keep your child's lunch cool, and be ready to drink by lunchtime.
- Make it fun: Pack a surprise in each lunch. Stickers, lollipops or a small treat are easy to include in a lunch bag. Kids love packaging, so small packets of Potato Sticks or pudding add a lot to their enjoyment of a meal. Decorated with lively stick characters, individual packages of potato sticks are one way to add an element of fun to a traditional bag lunch.