

# PACKING LUNCHES IN KINDERGARTEN



Kindergarten can be a big transition for little ones. While some children may be used to eating meals with others, such as at child care, for some children, this could be a new experience. Read on for some strategies to make school lunch and snacks easier.

Packing your child nutritious foods for lunch and snacks throughout the day will help give them energy to learn and play. You and your child each have roles for meal and snack times. Maintaining these roles will help your child become a healthy eater.

## Your role is to decide:

- What foods to offer
- When to offer these foods
- Where your child will eat

While at school, the school determines when and where children will eat based on the school routine.

## Your child's role is to decide:

- Which foods to eat from the foods offered
- How much to eat

Children may on occasion, choose not to eat at all. Trust your child to eat what they need.

## LUNCH ROUTINES

Each school has a different daily routine. Contact the school to find out when lunch and snack times are.

Some schools have two 20-minute nutrition breaks with one late morning and one late afternoon eating periods. For these

schools, some parents find it helpful to have a lunch bag divided into two sections.

Other schools have a lunch break mid-day and two recesses. Children may have the opportunity to eat a snack during recess. Adjust your daily schedule to align with the school's lunch and snack times, if possible.

Remember, it is your child's choice if they want to eat the food packed. It is not the school's role to decide at which break children can eat the food.

Lunch time in the kindergarten classroom can be busy and noisy. It may take time for your child to adjust to eating in a new environment.

## FOOD ALLERGENS

Let the school know if your child has a food allergy. Your child's school will inform families if there is a particular life-threatening allergy at the school. You can help keep students with food allergies safe at school by:

- Avoid sending nut or peanut products, as most schools are nut and peanut-free. Check with your school board if peanut butter replacements, such as sunflower seed butter or soy butter, are allowed.
- Follow instructions if the school informs you not to include certain foods.
- Avoid sending food for the entire class.
- Encourage handwashing before and after eating and before and after school.

## PUBLIC HEALTH

1-800-361-5653

TTY 1-866-512-6228

[york.ca/FeedingKids](http://york.ca/FeedingKids)

24-PH3-070

## LITTERLESS LUNCHES

Many schools are litterless. This means any food wrappers or uneaten food will be sent home. You can help support a litterless lunch by using reusable containers. For some items, it may be easier to re-pack them in a container to reduce cleanup in the lunch bag. For example, pack yogurt in a reusable container with a leak-free lid instead of a single serve yogurt cup.

Ensure all lunch bags, water bottles and containers are labelled with your child's name.

## SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION

Talk to your child about the lunch and snack routine for starting kindergarten.

Teachers and early childhood educators are not present during lunchtime and are unable to assist children with opening lunch bags and containers. Some schools have lunch monitors or volunteers during lunch or nutrition breaks. It is important your child can independently eat their lunch. This means they can do the following without help:

- Take their lunch bag out of their backpack
- Open and close the lunch bag
- Open and close any containers or packaging
- Be able to eat the food and use any utensils, such as fork and spoon, on their own

Take some time before school starts to practice these skills. Teach your child how and who to ask if they need help. Make foods easy to eat by cutting foods into small pieces. Involve your child in packing lunches. Have your child:

- Pick out a special lunch bag at the store
- Pack food into their lunch bag
- Go grocery shopping with you and help find items in the store
- Help with simple kitchen tasks like measuring and mixing ingredients
- Unpack their lunch bag after school

You don't need fancy lunch boxes, bento boxes or containers. Containers that are easy for little hands to open and are easy to clean are best.

## FOOD SAFETY IN THE CLASSROOM

There are no microwaves at school. If leftovers are being reheated for lunch, heat them at home and make sure they are heated to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F) or higher. Once hot, keep food hot for lunch in an insulated thermal container and follow the manufacturer's directions.

To keep cold food cold, use icepacks and an insulated lunch bag. Clean the insulated lunch bag with hot, soapy water every day. Thoroughly wash re-useable drinking bottles and food containers every day.

Discard leftover perishable food that has remained in the lunch bag all day. Examples of perishable foods include leftovers that were reheated or foods that should be kept cold like yogurt, sliced fruit or vegetables or sandwiches.

For additional food safety tips for packing safe lunches, please see the Packing Safe Lunches fact sheet.

## WHAT TO PACK IN THE LUNCH BAG

You do not need to buy special products or foods, such as special lunch snacks or meal kits. Aim to pack a variety of foods from Canada's food guide. Snacks are a great opportunity to offer vegetables and fruit. Pack foods that your child generally likes and is familiar with.

Tap water packed in a reusable water bottle is a great way to stay hydrated and quench thirst. York Region provides clean, safe and reliable drinking water.

Unsweetened lower fat milk and some plant-based beverages are other options for lunches and provide a good source of protein, calcium and vitamin D. When choosing plant-based beverages, look for products that are unsweetened, fortified with calcium and vitamin D and have at least 6 grams of protein in a 250 mL serving. When packing milk or plant-based beverages, use a leak-free container and pack with an ice pack.

Sugary drinks, including 100% fruit juice, increase the risk of cavities. Read a product's Nutrition Facts Table to see how much sugar a product has. If the table has more than 15% Daily Value for sugars, it has a lot of sugar.





### Snack ideas

- Small bran muffin with sliced nectarine
- Yogurt and chopped grapes
- Trail mix (combine two types of whole grain cereal) and a pre-peeled mandarin
- Edamame (young green soy beans) with whole grain breadsticks
- Cucumber sticks and cheese cubes
- Pear sliced with cottage cheese

### Hot lunch ideas for insulated thermal container

- Leftover lentil dahl with rice, served with plain yogurt and fresh fruit
- Oatmeal with blueberries and yogurt for topping
- Scrambled eggs, whole grain crackers, quartered cherry tomatoes and a banana
- Leftover pasta with meatballs, tomato sauce and pear slices

### Cold lunch ideas with ice packs

- Dry, whole grain cereal, cucumber slices, cantaloupe chunks and milk
- Whole wheat pita wedges or naan with bell pepper strips, cheese cubes and hummus
- Tuna (canned, light) or egg salad on whole grain crackers with orange slices and snap peas
- Whole grain tortilla rolled up with hummus, shredded vegetables and cheese
- Try packing leftovers cold
- Chickpea or black bean salad with whole wheat tortilla and yogurt

Visit [york.ca/LetsCook](http://york.ca/LetsCook) for recipe ideas and inspiration.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional nutrition resources and videos, visit [york.ca/FeedingKids](http://york.ca/FeedingKids) or [unlockfood.ca](http://unlockfood.ca)

For other York Region Public Health topics related to parenting, visit, [york.ca/Parenting](http://york.ca/Parenting)

For more information and support with feeding or parenting young children, call York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653, TTY 1-866-252-9933 or chat live at [york.ca/NurseChat](http://york.ca/NurseChat) to speak to a Public Health nurse.

## APPETITE CHANGES

Your child's appetite is affected by:

- Activity level
- Mood or energy level, such as excited or tired
- Growth needs, such as starting or finishing a growth spurt
- Dental considerations like molars, loss of a tooth or dental caries
- Illness, including sore throat, tummy ache

Keep in mind that appetite changes from day to day or even meal to meal are expected. Food likes and dislikes can also change quickly. Your child may bring home their favourite food or eat all of a new food.

Be prepared for food to come home and trust that your child is eating enough. Reassure yourself that it is OK if your child doesn't eat much at school, they will likely make up for it when they get home. It is normal for appetites to change when starting kindergarten or a new class. Lunch time in the kindergarten classroom can be busy and noisy. You can support your child through the transition by having a nutritious after-school snack or opting for an earlier dinner time.