

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Lunch Pail Essentials

It's officially back-to-school time! A new school year means new teachers, reuniting with old classroom friends, and getting back into daily routines, like packing lunches and snacks before sending your little ones off to school.

The National School Lunch Program provides nutritionally balanced lunches to children each school day. Children can qualify for free or reduced school meals based on household income and family size.

If your little ones prefer bringing their lunch from home, here are five tips to keep their meals inexpensive, healthy, and best of all...SIMPLE!

1. **Focus on the MyPlate Template:** It is important to aim for balanced meals that include lean protein, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy. If aiming for all the sections is challenging, aim for at least 3 sections of the MyPlate!
2. **Protein and Fiber are key:** Both are key players in keeping bellies full and bodies growing.
3. **Prep Lunch Box Items in Bulk:** To save you extra time in the kitchen, try to prep as much in bulk ahead of time. A great snack to prepare in large batches to keep on hand is a healthy trail mix with dried fruit and nuts. You can also keep precut fruits and vegetables in your fridge.
4. **Rethink the Drink:** Pack water and skip the sugary beverages! Go out with your littles and let them pick out their own reusable water bottle. You could even make a fun activity out of this by picking up some packs of stickers and letting them decorate their bottle.
5. **Keep it Cool....or Hot:** To ensure that all cool foods stay cold and that all hot food stays hot, it's important to pack all lunch pails with the appropriate cooling and heating packs. To save you the headache, it's a smart idea to empty their lunch pails as soon as they get home so that you can make sure everything is ready for the next school day!

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