

Healthy Lunches



Going out for lunch can cost about \$10 a day, which adds up quickly over a month. Bringing a lunch to work or school can trim your budget and is usually healthier. By making your own lunches, you can control portions and choose healthy ingredients. Plan balanced lunches that have at least two of the following food groups:

- **Lean protein foods:** Good choices include lean meats; chicken or turkey without the skin; eggs; beans; fish canned in water; and tofu. Be aware that many deli meats are high in salt and fat.
- **Low-fat or nonfat dairy:** Good choices include fat-free milk, low-fat yogurt, and low-fat cheeses. To save money, buy large tubs of yogurt and divide into your own single-serving containers.
- **Whole grains:** Choose breads, crackers, and pastas with a whole grain (like whole wheat) listed as the first ingredient. Whole grains like brown rice, cracked wheat, or quinoa make tasty salads.
- **Fruits:** Choose in-season fresh fruits, dried fruits, or fruits canned in water or natural juices.
- **Vegetables:** Choose in-season fresh vegetables. To save money, prep your own veggies at home instead of buying pre-cut vegetables like carrot sticks.

Here are four lunch ideas to get you started:

Leftovers

- Wrap leftovers in a corn or whole wheat tortilla. Try fillings like beans and rice, chili, stew, or chicken. Pack fresh fruit or vegetables to balance the meal.
- **Food groups:** Whole grains, protein foods, and fruits or vegetables.
- **Cost:** About \$0.97 (\$0.25 per whole wheat tortilla + \$0.72 per apple).

Tuna Salad

- Create a salad with lettuce, 3 ounces of canned tuna packed in water, sliced apple, and 2 tablespoons of light vinaigrette.
- **Food groups:** Lean protein foods, fruit, and vegetables.
- **Cost:** About \$1.93 (\$0.81 per 3 ounces canned tuna + \$0.72 per apple + \$0.19 per cup of lettuce + \$0.21 per 2 tablespoons dressing).



Mediterranean Sandwich

- Spread 2 tablespoons hummus in a whole wheat pita. Add 1 ounce of low-fat Swiss cheese, sliced cucumber, and chopped tomatoes. Toss cucumber and tomato in 1 teaspoon olive oil and lemon juice for extra flavor. Make your own hummus to save more money.
- **Food groups:** Low-fat protein foods, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and vegetables.
- **Cost:** About \$1.78 (\$0.30 per 2 tablespoons hummus + \$0.22 per pita + \$0.43 per ounce of cheese + \$0.40 per cucumber; + \$0.39 per tomato + \$0.05 per teaspoon olive oil).

PB&J

- Spread two tablespoons of peanut butter plus 1 tablespoon of jam on 100% whole wheat bread for a perfect lunch. Add low-fat yogurt and fruit as side dishes.
- **Food groups:** Protein foods, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and fruit.
- **Cost:** About \$1.86 (\$0.27 per 2 tablespoons peanut butter + \$0.11 per tablespoon jam + \$0.72 per apple + \$0.60 per 6 ounces yogurt + \$0.16 for whole wheat bread)

Tips for Packing and Storing a Lunch

- Make lunches the night before to save time in the morning.
- Keep lunches in a refrigerator or an insulated lunch bag with an ice pack. Lunches that sit at room temperature for over 2 hours may not be safe to eat.
- Instead of buying a drink in a can or bottle, pack water or another beverage in a reusable bottle. Choose a bottle free of the type of plastic known as “BPA.” Unhealthy chemicals from BPA plastic containers could spread to the liquids inside.

