

On-The-Go Packed Lunches



Lunch? Lunch? What's for lunch?

By Bob Wilson BS, DTR

Bringing lunch from home is truly a bargain in a bag - easy on both your weight and your wallet. Making your own midday meal gives you better control over portion size, calorie and fat content, and at the same time provides nutritional benefits that can even lower the risk of many chronic diseases and save lots of money too.

The most popular purchased lunches to eat at the office are sandwiches, wraps and salads. But they can be full of hidden fats and calories and poor nutrition bargains. The only way to get a true bargain is to make your own.

Surveys indicate most workers eat lunch at their desks or while doing errands. According to one study, less than half of office workers surveyed say they bring a **packed lunch from home** at least once a week, and **only 20 percent do it every day**. Of those surveyed, 34 percent bought take-out or delivered food, and another 4 percent used the office vending machine at least once a week. How about you, what do you do?

Although take-out sandwiches and other popular lunch items can be made with healthful ingredients, and reasonable proportions do exist, but are often hard to find, or in locations that are not conveniently close to the office. Many take-out or delivered lunches are oversized portions of foods high in fat and calories. To solve this dilemma, learn the art of bringing your own!

Preplanning is important. Failing to plan is planning to fail. An ounce of preplanning is worth a pound of fat! Remember, it doesn't have to be "all or nothing"—you can still use your cafeteria for a main course, but bring along cut up veggies or fruit to supplement.

What to do:

1. Sandwiches prepared the night before or in the morning before leaving for work should be safe to eat, if properly handled. Proper handling means good sanitation, adequate cooking, and refrigeration.
2. If the food was properly handled at home with the sandwiches being chilled or frozen, it should be safe to eat at lunch time, even if not refrigerated at work.
3. A small thermos with a wide mouth might be a good investment. It can be used to carry such things as chili, sliced fresh fruit, and coleslaw—foods that might add variety.
4. Save small plastic tubs (about 6 - 8 ounce size) or Ziplock® bags. The containers are good for carrying salad, fruit, yogurt, and cut up veggies.

5. Try to use leftover meats and meat substitutes as sandwich fillers; e.g., chicken salad made from leftover chicken, roast beef, tempeh, or marinated tofu.
6. Raw veggies are a treasure house of nutrients! They are also high in fiber, which helps prevent cancer and colon disorders.
7. Lowfat cheese and crackers with perhaps an apple or some grapes provide a simple and delicious lunch meal.
8. Desserts should be kept simple. Try raw or dried fruit, pumpkin seeds, or maybe some other nuts.
9. Many light and quick lunch ideas are discussed throughout this Website.

Keeping foods safe:

In really hot weather, put something cold in the lunch bag--a cold drink, frozen sandwich, a small plastic refrigerator dish filled with water and frozen, or one of the new commercial freezing gels, suggests the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the publication *Safe Food To Go*. Some plastic lunch boxes have lids that can be frozen to keep foods cool for several hours. Canned drinks and some of the juices in paper cartons can also be frozen. I keep a canvas bag with a double brown bag as an insulator and found that that works out very well. Visit [Bob's Strength -Training Food Bag!](#)

Freezing luncheon foods:

1. Freezing *only* the bread helps out. Normally, it keeps other foods cold enough without refrigeration.
2. Sandwiches could be wrapped in foil or plastic sandwich bags and frozen the night before. When freezing sandwiches, omit lettuce or other greens. Wrap lettuce or greens separately. Add to sandwich at time of eating.
3. Sandwich freezing cautions:
 - a. Salad veggies become watery and limp.
 - b. Hard boiled eggs get rubbery.
 - c. Cream cheese gets crumbly, but still tastes OK.
 - d. Condiments like mustard, catsup, etc, freeze well.

To begin, be prepared. Have a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in your home at all times. Check out [Bob's Healthy Kitchen, What's In It?](#)

Sandwich Ideas

Egg	Chop hard cooked egg (or cook egg substitute) and mix with yogurt or salad dressing. For variety, add one or a combination of the following:		
	onion celery raisins	bean sprouts lettuce grated carrot	diced red/green pepper grated cheese raw spinach
	Herbs: basil, dill, Italian seasoning, pepper, curry powder, or cilantro		
	Sauces: plain yogurt, mix with horseradish, chopped parsley, green onions, or use yogurt and spicy mustard. *Calories/tablespoon: Plain yogurt = 8/T; mayonnaise = 100/T; lowfat mayonnaise = 50/T; sour cream = 26/T; mustard = 15/T; tomato catsup = 15/T		

Low-fat Cheese or cottage cheese	Sliced or grated with salad dressing (or yogurt/curry dressing). You could also use ricotta cheese. For variety add:		
	bean sprouts spicy mustard chopped fruit	crushed pineapple cucumber mushrooms	green pepper rings chopped/sliced onions tomatoes
Baked beans	Mashed with chopped onion, green pepper, and a small amount of chili sauce and raisins; can also just use canned refried black or other beans.		
Hummus or garbanzo spread	Can add: sliced tomatoes, spinach or chopped chard, sprouts, thin sliced cheddar cheese, or red/orange sweet pepper strips		
Fish	Water-pack tuna with: diced onion and celery, spicy mustard, pepper, catsup, dill pickle relish, or apple slices and raisins!	Regular or smoked salmon with low-fat mayonnaise or salad dressing, celery and sprouts	Sardines with thin sliced red onions and sprouts.
Meat: Turkey sausage or salami Beef or pork, sliced or chopped	With meats (or meat substitutes like tempeh, veggie burgers, or marinated tofu) add: spicy mustard, sweet pickle relish or curry dressing and sprouts, peppers, sliced tomatoes and onions, raw greens, and shredded carrots. You could add cranberry relish (see dinner recipes).		
Muffin pizzas	English muffin (pre-toasted) add: bottled spaghetti sauce and top with mozzarella cheese and Italian seasonings. Perhaps top with: red onion slices, tomato slices, sliced mushrooms, red pepper slices, garlic and pepper seasonings. Broil until crisp.		

Breads

Explore delicious and dense breads, pocket breads, or even corn tortillas. To cut back on calories or carbs, eat half a sandwich or make an open face one.

Whole grains, which are much more nutrient-dense than refined white flour, are full of fiber and filling. They are rich in many health-protective substances, like antioxidants, phytochemicals, vitamin E, folic acid, zinc, selenium and magnesium. When selecting a loaf of bread, the ingredient label should list as the first item either "100 percent whole grain" or the word "whole" followed by the grain used.

Try purchasing different kinds of whole-grain breads, if a particular one doesn't appeal to you. Multi-grain breads with oats on the outside tend to be slighter sweeter. For a wonderfully soft and chewy taste, bake your own with whole-wheat flour, or look for freshly baked loaves. Whole-grain tortillas and pita bread are also great alternatives that you may prefer.

Fruits and/or Vegetables

Some thing crisp or juicy...yum!

Raw veggies:
 Anise/fennel root
 Cucumbers (I love small pickling)
 Carrot strips
 Celery sticks
 Jiccima slices or chunks
 Cherry/grape tomatoes
 Radishes
 Turnip sticks
 Cauliflower florets
 Cucumber strips
 Kohlrabi slices
 Lettuce or cabbage wedges
 Broccoli floweret's
 Steamed marinated veggies (see dinner recipes)

Raw fruits:
 Apples
 Bananas
 Blueberries
 Grapefruit
 Oranges
 Mango
 Pears
 Tangerines
 Strawberries
 Apricots
 Berries
 Grapes
 Peaches
 Papaya
 Plums
 Melon wedges
 Pineapple

Foods to avoid:

Foods which should be avoided are those which contain excessive amounts of saturated fat, sugar, or potentially harmful food additives, regular corn or potato chips, sticky cakes, cookies, and rich pastries. These foods have little or no nutritional value and are high in calories and cost. Explore [Confused About Carbohydrates?](#)

Remember what you eat...becomes you!

Packed Lunches for On-The-Go

Cottage cheese & raisin sandwich on multiseed/multigrain bread Green pepper wedges Fresh orange	Turkey salad sandwich on multigrain bread Small green salad (low calorie dressing) Banana & Barbara's® Raspberry Fig Bars
Bean sandwich on whole wheat bread Coleslaw Carrot sticks Fresh apple	Salmon salad sandwich with romaine lettuce Carrot strips & fennel root Fresh cherries
Sliced turkey, tomato, lettuce on whole wheat English muffin Baked yam or sweet potato wedge Green pepper strips Kumquats	Chicken drumsticks Whole-grain roll or muffin Cherry tomatoes Fruit salad

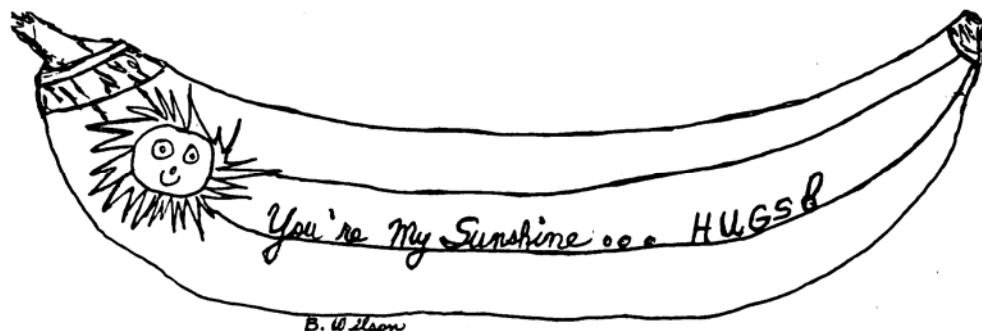
Cheddar cheese (spicy mustard) & bean sprout/sliced onion sandwich Cauliflower & cherry tomatoes Fresh orange & raw walnuts	Scrambled egg sandwich Fresh tomato/spinach leaves 2 T. pumpkin, sunflower seeds, or pine nuts Fresh pear
Tuna salad on whole wheat roll Green pepper wedges Broccoli florets & Jiccima chunks Fresh apple or grapes	Ricotta cheese and pineapple (spices: nutmeg and cinnamon) or whole wheat raisin bread Jiccima & red pepper wedges Fresh orange
Swiss cheese sandwich with spicy mustard, sprouts and avocado in whole wheat pita bread Cucumbers & grape tomatoes Tangerine or plums	Hummus/lowfat cheese sandwich with sliced tomatoes & chard on spelt bread Pickling cucumbers & cauliflower Kiwi fruit & raw pecans
Veggie sandwich on whole wheat with sliced cucumber, romaine lettuce, sliced tomato, sprouts, and lowfat cheddar cheese Marinated cauliflower Fresh peach	Fresh lemonade/limeade Cold chicken breast Whole wheat French roll/hot Chinese mustard Sliced tomatoes and red onions Watermelon and kiwi fruit
Chopped chicken liver sandwich on rye bread Carrot sticks & cherry tomatoes Fresh apple	Lowfat cheese wedges Lowfat taco chips Mexican salsa Banana & dried date

You could also make...

Warm and hearty soups to take along, or colorful and crunchy salads, or leftover stir fries, or satisfying steamed vegetables. Enjoy all of these delicious lunches!

Surprises—food for the spirit!

On special occasions (really any time!), include a favorite treat in the packed lunch. Add a message like "You are magnificent," or a short poem or verse like "You're cute, you're cute, I love you...to boot!" Include a funny drawing (even on a banana) or a portrait on an open face sandwich. For the face use peanut butter or ricotta cheese, carrot curls or parsley for hair, green pepper, apple, nuts, and raisins for the eyes and nose.



Food for the Spirit

A *fun* thing to do is to write a message on a green banana and mail it to a friend. Just wrap it in a tissue paper, put it in a small box and mail it. When it arrives at its destination, it will have ripened to its normal yellow color and greet its recipient with cheery tidings. You've heard of F.T.D. florists? Well, this is B.T.D. banana—Banana Trans Delivery! A sample message could be, "My love has ripened for you." Or "You drive me bananas." Or "I find you so appealing."

I keep a meditation book in my lunch bag so that I can take time to "nourish my spirit." I may bring along some sticky notes (or bananas) with affirming messages from Nourishing Affirmations! and find that these can help really make my day. They are fuel for my soul and lift me up when I feel drooped. When I'm feeling the need to be embraced by kindness, I review Loving-Kindness: Learn to Befriend Ourselves and Others. If I'm feeling really confused I look at Out of Hell, Into Freedom Thoughts.

Excellent Newsletter Resources

- ❖ <http://www.planetsark.com/> *Living Juicy-Daily Morsels For Your Creative Soul, & The Bodacious Book of Succulence* by SARK(1994), Celestial Arts, Berkeley, California. For a catalog, call: (800) 841-BOOK. These books (and SARK'S Web site) are SO MUCH FUN and are delightfully colorful!
- ❖ www.cspinet.org —*Nutrition Action Health Letter*. Filled with product evaluations and current nutrition issues.
- ❖ AICR --American Institute of Cancer research--Newsletter, call 1-800-843-8114, extension 34; 9 am-5 pm, EST, www.aicr.org Terrific quarterly newsletter: http://www.aicr.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pub_news_2
- ❖ Food Reflections Electronic Newsletter: focusing on food, nutrition and food safety from the University of Nebraska, <http://lancaster.unl.edu/food/food-reflections.shtml> Can subscribe and review past issues. The COOK IT QUICK and *Volumetrics Weight Control* sections are superb. This newsletter is exceptional.
- ❖ Feeding Kids Electronic Newsletter: By Connie Evers, www.nutritionforkids.com