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| **5 Reasons to Pack Your Lunch**  **5 Reasons to Pack Your Lunch**  Most schools are trying hard to upgrade their lunch programs and offer the best food they can. But not every school cafeteria provides appealing, healthy lunch choices. Educate yourself when it comes to what your cafeteria has to offer. For example, did you know chicken nuggets have more fat and calories than a plain burger?  Even if your school provides healthy options, it can be too easy to give in to temptation and pick a less healthy choice when you're feeling really hungry. How do you take control? Take a packed lunch to school!  Here are the top 5 reasons to pack your lunch — and snacks — at least twice a week:  **1. Control.** Do you ever wait in the lunch line only to find when you get to the front that you don't like what they're serving? So you reach for pizza again. A healthy packed lunch lets you avoid the lunch line (and any temptations). Bringing your own lunch also lets you control exactly what goes into the food you eat.  **2. Variety.** It doesn't hurt to cave in and enjoy the occasional serving of pizza and hot dogs. But if you're eating these foods all the time, your body probably feels ready for a change. A packed lunch a couple of times a week means you can enjoy some favorites that you might not find at every school — like a piping hot thermos of your mom's chicken soup; hummus and pita bread; or some crisp, farm-stand apples.  **3. Energy.** If you have a big game or activity after school, plan a lunch and snacks that combine lean proteins with carbohydrates to give you lasting energy and keep you going through the late afternoon. Some ideas: your own "trail" mix of dried fruit and nuts or sunflower seeds, whole-grain pretzels and low-fat cheese, or a bagful of baby carrots and yogurt dip.  **4. Cold hard cash.** Pack healthy snacks so you don't feel tempted to step off campus for a fast-food lunch, or hit the vending machine or corner store for chocolate and a soda! Put the money you save on such snacks aside.  **5. That warm and fuzzy feeling.** Remember when your mom or dad used to pack your lunch? Pack yourself a retro lunch featuring healthy versions of your old faves — such as PB&J on whole-wheat bread.  Whether you pack or eat in the cafeteria, what’s important is that you make healthy choices. If you're concerned that your cafeteria doesn't offer enough healthy choices, get involved in trying to make changes. Ask a teacher or someone in food service for advice on how to get started.  Want to know more on this topic? Check out the articles listed below.  Reviewed by: Mary L. Gavin, MD Date reviewed: February 2008 | | |  |
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