

Lunch Lessons



Grilled Chicken Slices and fresh vegetables

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Mini Fruit Salad Recipes

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Homemade Healthy Energy Bar

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Deluxe Grilled Chicken Sandwich

For more information or to order Calcagno's personal chef services, go to www.cuisinebydarlene.com.

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WEB EXTRA

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Darlene Calcagno

5 A+ Tips for Packing Healthy Lunches for Kids

As summer winds down and kids get back into their academic routine, parents are faced with the daily question, 'What do I send for school lunch?' With so much farm-fresh produce and earth-friendly packaging available, you can now think "lean and green."

Darlene Calcagno, a personal chef from Hanover and owner of Cuisine by Darlene, is experienced at the art of preparing healthy meals that kids (and adults) will devour. Calcagno goes into clients' kitchens on the South Shore to make delectable meals they can eat right away. She also freezes dishes for

nights when cooking from scratch or dining out are not an option. Certified by the United States Personal Chef Association and nutritiously minded, Calcagno has been menu planning and cooking for families, couples, and singletons since 1999.

The key to getting your school lunch mojo going, says Calcagno, is to serve up leftovers from the night before. This helps parents breakout of the daily grind of making nitrate-loaded deli sandwiches with low nutritional value. Plus, "for variety, you don't always have to have a sandwich," says Calcagno.



Here are five lessons for making healthy lunches that even the busiest family can manage:

tomatoes are in season. Include sliced apples or sprinkle dried pumpkin seeds on fresh fruit for fiber and crunch.

Squeeze in vegetables. Parents should serve veggies on a regular basis, even if it's just a tiny broccoli floret. "It's a difficult battle and balancing act," says Calcagno. "Give kids the opportunity to taste something new. It's often said that it takes about 15 times of offering a child a type of food for them to try it."

Take baby steps towards making school lunch healthier. If a complete overhaul is too overwhelming, start with making snacks, like homemade energy bars. Or, pack a cut fruit salad. Keep it

simple, easy, fun, delicious. If parents do need to buy packaged foods for school lunch, Calcagno suggests hummus with carrot sticks, yogurt, small containers of pre-cut fruit or applesauce, little packages of almonds or trail mix, and brown rice cakes with almond butter, as great options.

Use whole foods versus processed foods. Plan ahead and grill three to four chicken breasts early in the week and save one to slice super thin into sandwich meat. "At least you know you've made it yourself," says Calcagno. You can use the other breasts to make chicken Caesar salad or chicken salad wraps with brown rice and avocado.

Use the following formula every day: Fill lunch boxes with a protein, vegetable, healthy fat and fruit. "Kids can get carbohydrates and fiber from fruits and vegetables," says Calcagno.

Pack fruits and vegetables fresh off the vine. In September, apples, grapes, pomegranates, pumpkins, spinach, and

The following is a sampling of simple recipes for kids:



1

Mini Fruit Salad Recipes

- 1 Watermelon and/or pineapple chunks with blackberries and fresh pomegranate seeds
- 2 Fresh figs cut up with grapes
- 3 Mango with blueberries and pomegranate seeds
- 4 Orange segments with chocolate covered pomegranate seeds, as a treat
- 5 Kiwi slices with freshly cut strawberries

Tip: Pomegranates have high levels of flavonoids, which is an antioxidant. This type of antioxidant is known to help fight against free radicals and keep kids healthy.

2

Homemade Healthy Energy Bar

- 1/2 cup almonds (slivered, sliced or crushed)
- 1/2 cup sesame seeds
- 1/2 cup sunflower seeds
- 1 scant cup dried fruit (dried organic apples, chopped, or cranberries, figs, apricots, dried blueberries)
- 1/2 cup whole wheat pastry flour (or oat or soy flour)
- 1/2 cup non-fat powdered (dry) milk
- 1/2 cup wheat germ
- 2 cups quick cooking or old fashioned oats
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/2 cup organic canola oil (or try coconut oil)

- 1 Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9 x 13 inch baking pan with cooking spray.
- 2 Place all dry ingredients (everything except honey, water and oil) in a large bowl and stir.
- 3 Combine honey, water and oil and bring to a gentle boil. Pour wet ingredients over dry ingredients. Mix together until all ingredients are moistened. Spread as even layer in pan.



- 4 Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes, until edges are golden. Cut into 20 squares.

Notes and Tips: The seeds and nuts may be raw or toasted. Substitute almonds with other nuts or use a different oil (except olive oil), as needed. You can also experiment with flours, or different fruits, such as raisins, figs or apricots. Try adding one fresh apple, minced, or adding a little ginger, as a spice.

3

Deluxe Grilled Chicken Sandwich

- Whole wheat bread or whole wheat bulkie roll
- Honey mustard sauce, mayo, hummus, or soft goat cheese
- 4 raw spinach leaves (or lettuce)
- 2 slices of grilled chicken breast (see recipe online)
- Slice of cheese (if you didn't use goat cheese as a spread)
- Tomato slice (optional), seeds removed
- Small roasted pepper slice

- 1 Pick and choose items to make a sandwich.
- 2 Spread bread with your choice of ingredient.
- 3 Place chicken down, then layer with spinach, tomato, and then another piece of chicken, keeping moister ingredients in the middle, not touching bread. Wrap in one layer of waxed paper, cut sandwich in half, and then wrap in another layer of waxed paper. Cut into squares.



Homemade Honey Mustard Sauce:

- 5 tablespoons honey
- 3 tablespoons dijon mustard, smooth type
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar (or try apple cider vinegar)

Whisk all ingredients together in a small bowl. Use as a dipping sauce for chicken, as a sandwich spread or even as a salad dressing.



Reusable Lunch Boxes With Bite

Cut down on plastic bags by packing foods in lunch boxes. Add extra ice to a PBA-free water bottle to double as a cold pack and refreshing drink.

Lunch Jar from Laptop Lunches. Soups sizzle in this non-toxic, stainless steel hot food can. Holds 17 fluid ounces. Hot pink or black trim. Whole Foods, 94 Derby Street, Hingham, (617) 375-1010

Dabbawalla Lunch Bags and Lunch Sacks made from eco-sponge, are certified free of lead, PCV, phthalates, and more than 100 other harmful substances. Insulated and machine washable. ONE, 35 Depot Street, Duxbury, (781) 934-7774.

Lunchbugs from Mimi the Sardine come in vibrant colors and adorable,

eco-friendly material in designs such as Hybrid Cars. Bags have a zipper and handle on top to hold food upright. ONE, 35 Depot Street, Duxbury, (781) 934-7774

FLUF white canvas lunch totes made with 100 percent certified organic cotton. G Green Design Center, 134 Washington Street, Norwell, (781) 561-1221.

LunchBots Rounds, stainless steel, leak proof containers, are a healthy alternative to plastic bags and hold all types of foods. ONE, 35 Depot Street, Duxbury, (781) 934-7774