



## 10 Healthy Brown Bag Lunch Ideas

**Brown bag lunches are not just for kids, try these 10 workday meals that help save you time, money and calories.**

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While you are packing lunches for your kids, why not pack one for yourself?

Taking a healthy lunch to work (along with making your own coffee in the morning) is a surefire way to trim your budget. Most people think nothing of spending \$10 or more for lunch, but over the course of a month – or a year – the expense can really add up. Increase your savings by bringing coffee in a to-go mug from home instead of stopping at your favorite coffee shop.

Beyond the cost savings, most meals packed at home are healthier than foods at restaurants. When we eat out, we're often faced with large portions and fattening extras – such as French fries, cookies or chips – that routinely come with sandwiches. But, when you pack lunch at home, you can control your portions and choose healthier ingredients.

### Basics of a Healthy Brown Bag

Unless you're willing to eat the same type of sandwich day in and day out, it's easy to run out of ideas. The ideal lunch contains 1/4 lean protein, 1/4 whole grain, 1/4 vegetable, 1/4 fruit and a serving of low-fat dairy.

Lunches that include some lean or low-fat protein along with smart carbohydrates will keep your body fueled for the afternoon. The combination of protein and fiber from whole grains, beans, nuts, vegetables and/or fruit will give you the most satisfying and nutritious combination of foods that will keep you feeling full until dinner.

If you love sandwiches, use a variety of whole-grain breads, pitas and wraps. Choose lean fillings such as sliced eggs, tuna fish, cheese or lean meats. Then jazz up your sandwiches with assorted greens, fresh basil, sprouts, sliced cucumbers, onions and/or tomatoes.

Make sure you include fruit, veggies and low-fat dairy to round out the meal, and get all the nutrients you need which also will help you feel satisfied.

### Plan Ahead

Sandwiches are far from your only option when you're brown bagging it. Last night's dinner, hard-boiled eggs, vegetarian wraps, fruit and yogurt, anything you enjoy at home can be packed up and eaten for lunch.

Plan ahead and make extra food for dinner so you'll have leftovers to bring for lunch. Leftovers are the perfect food to pack and take for lunch because you can control the portions and calories in the meal to ensure it will be nutritious, filling and delicious. Just pack up last night's leftovers in a microwave-safe container along with a piece of fruit and some veggies for a hearty and satisfying lunch.

Another option, on the weekend, cook up a batch of your favorite foods. Make a big pot of chili, soup, or rice and beans then freeze into individual portions that are ready to take to work in a flash.

Convenience foods also can make quick and easy lunches as long as you choose them carefully. Select foods that are not too high in sodium or calories.

Canned soups and frozen meals can be inexpensive, especially if you stock up when they're on sale, and all you have to do is grab one when you're running out the door. Pair these portion-controlled items with a side salad or piece of fruit to provide enough calories to keep you feeling full.

Think about lunch tomorrow so you have all the ingredients in the kitchen to put together lunch after dinner.

## 10 Easy Lunch Ideas

Here are recommendations for healthy, creative lunch ideas that are not only inexpensive, but quick and easy to prepare.

1. One whole-wheat pita with mixed greens, grilled chicken and light Caesar dressing, baby carrots and a piece of fruit.
2. Salmon lettuce wraps with light sesame Asian dressing, whole grain crackers, low-fat plain yogurt mixed with an orange.
3. Tomato and cucumber salad with feta cheese, olive oil and vinegar, tuna salad on whole-wheat bread and an apple.
4. Grilled chicken on a bed of romaine with shredded carrots, cheese and light vinaigrette along with a pear.
5. Garden salad with canned or leftover salmon, tomato, cucumber and light vinaigrette, a whole grain roll, a bunch of grapes and a glass of skim milk.
6. Whole-wheat tortilla wrap of hummus, lettuce, sliced tomatoes, feta cheese and black olives; plus a carton of fat-free vanilla yogurt and berries.
7. Whole-wheat pita stuffed with vegetarian refried beans, salsa, lettuce and shredded cheddar cheese; and apple slices with peanut butter.
8. A green salad loaded with canned chunk light tuna, carrot strips, pepper slices, tomato wedges, red beans and dried cranberries topped with balsamic vinaigrette; with a cup of low-fat chocolate milk.
9. A peanut butter and banana sandwich on whole-wheat bread; a piece of fresh fruit; and low-fat yogurt.
10. Whole-wheat tortilla roll with sliced turkey, sliced low-fat mozzarella cheese, red pepper strips and lettuce leaf (chill and slice into bite size pieces); with fruit salad and a glass of skim milk.

To save money on beverages, use the water cooler at work.

Got a sweet tooth after lunch? Have fruit, chew sugarless gum or enjoy a few pieces of hard candy, or a few low-fat Graham crackers or vanilla wafers.

## Keep Your Lunch Healthy and Safe

Don't forget to keep your lunch refrigerated once you get to work. If you don't have access to refrigeration, invest in a lunchbox, insulated thermos, reusable plastic containers, plastic lunch bags and ice packs to keep your lunch at the proper temperature. Frozen 100% juice boxes wrapped in a plastic bag can do double duty to keep foods cold and satisfy your thirst at lunch.

