



## PARENT PLUS

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

### School lunches 101: Avoid prepackaged, processed foods

Stroll through any grocery store and you'll see a bevy of neatly compartmentalized prepackaged foods designed to make packing a child's lunch fast and easy. But with the ever-present threat of childhood obesity, these convenience products might be a ticking time-bomb.

It's important to make sure your children are getting nutritious lunches instead of refined and processed foods like chips, cookies and roll-ups. In processed foods, nutrients are stripped away and all that remains are sugar and artificial sweeteners.

In general, parents should try to make sure their children maintain a well-balanced diet. Serving food that comes in its natural form can ensure meals contain proper nutrients.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children consume a good balance of foods from the five major food groups: vegetables, fruits, grains, protein and dairy.

It also is important to moderate

sugar intake, as high-calorie diets contribute to obesity and potential dental complications.

Soda and juices are popular beverage choices but are dense with sugars. Reports have shown that each 12-ounce can of soda can contain the equivalent of 10 teaspoons of sugar; 100% fruit juices can contain just as much or more.

Try some of the following suggestions for packing a healthy lunch:

- Make sandwiches with whole wheat bread, not white, and avoid processed lunch meats.
- Pack whole fruits or vegetables like carrots or celery sticks.



- Include dips like hummus, guacamole or ranch dressing for vegetables.
- Instead of packing chips and cookies, try whole wheat pretzels or crackers.
- Replace soda and juices with fat-free milk or water.

Consider asking your children to choose between two healthy snacks like celery or carrots. This gives them some choice, but you retain control over what makes it into their lunch bag.

— David Ma