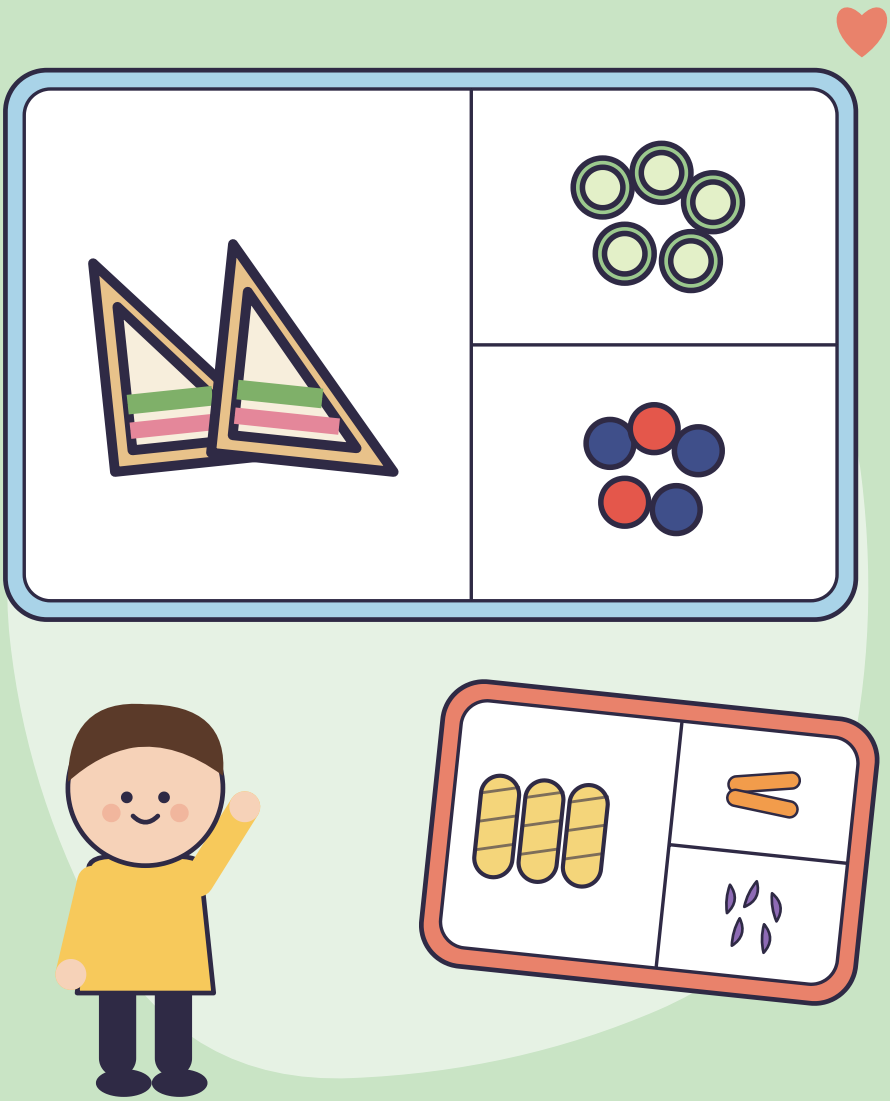


Less thinking. Easier school mornings.

The Real Food Lunchbox Plan

40 lunch ideas, 8 weekly plans, make-ahead recipes, and simple packing guidance, all ready to use.

For school-age kids

Includes 16 make-ahead mains and printable planners

A note before you begin

For every parent who's stared into the fridge at 7 a.m.

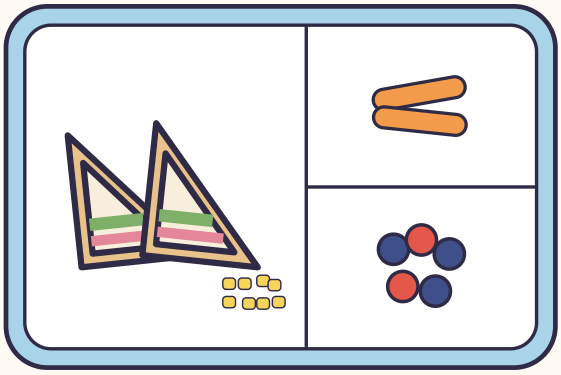
Packing lunch every school morning is one of those jobs that never ends. It's easy to fall into a rut of the same sandwich, the same crackers, and a quiet hope that something gets eaten.

This plan takes the thinking out of it. You'll get a simple five-part formula, 8 weeks of planned menus with shopping lists, 16 make-ahead mains, and a repeatable prep system for easier school mornings.

You'll also find straightforward guidance for keeping cold foods cold and hot foods hot, without turning lunch packing into a science project.

Real food. Less morning thinking. That's the goal.

Plan once a week. Pack in five minutes.



Why a little planning helps

Packed lunches do not need to be perfect. A little structure can make them easier to pack, more varied, and safer to carry.

What the research says

1.6%

of perishable items in 705 preschool lunches packed at home were at a safe temperature, measured 90 minutes before lunch. Even with multiple ice packs, more than 90% were too warm.

Almansour and colleagues, Pediatrics, 2011

What the research says

17% vs 61%

of packed lunches contained a vegetable, compared with 61% of school lunches, in a study of over 1,300 pre-K and kindergarten lunches.

Farris and colleagues, Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 2014

What the research says

61%

of packed lunches in the same study included a dessert, and 40% included a sugar-sweetened drink.

Farris and colleagues, 2014

What the research says

49.1%

of children aged 1 to 5 didn't eat a vegetable every day, in a national survey of parents.

CDC, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 2023

What this means for you

You don't need a perfect lunchbox. A simple plan, familiar foods, some variety, water, and sensible cold packing can make mornings easier.

What's inside

1 **The lunchbox formula** 6
The formula, portions, drinks, and allergies.

2 **Keep it safe** 12
Cold packing, thermoses, and food safety.

3 **The 8-week plan** 17
40 lunches with shopping lists.

4 **Make-ahead mains** 34
16 make-ahead mains.

5 **The packing system** 51
Prep hour, lunch station, and gear.

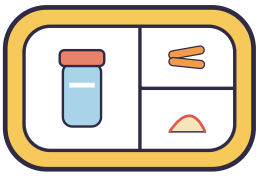
\+ **Printables** 56
Lunch builder, weekly planner, and lunchbox notes.

The 8 weeks

18 Easy classics
20 Wraps and dips
22 Hot lunch week
24 Around the world
26 Breakfast for lunch
28 No-sandwich week
30 Leftovers remix
32 Kid's choice

Part 3 Week 3

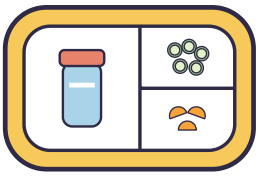
Week 3: Hot lunch week



Monday

Thermos mac and cheese with peas

Carrot sticks · Pear slices · Yogurt



Tuesday

Chicken noodle soup

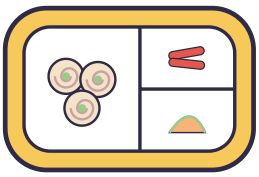
Cucumber coins · Clementine · Crackers



Wednesday

Thermos turkey meatballs and pasta

Snap peas · Grapes, quartered · Cheese cubes



Thursday

Bean and cheese burrito, wrapped in foil

Pepper strips · Melon cubes · Salsa



Friday

Leftover fried rice in a thermos

Edamame · Mandarin · Mini muffin

Part 4 Recipes

Mini Veggie Egg Muffins

Cold, with ice pack | Makes 12 muffins | Fridge, 4 days; freezer, 2 months



- 8 eggs
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1 cup finely chopped vegetables
- 1/2 cup shredded cheese

1. Whisk the eggs and milk. Stir in vegetables and cheese.
2. Pour into a greased muffin tin.
3. Bake at 350°F (175°C) for 18 to 20 minutes, until fully set.

Tip: Freeze extras and pack straight from the freezer.