

A Lot of Nutrition in a Little Brown Bag

North Carolina
HEALTH
Smart

IF YOU BRING YOUR LUNCH FROM HOME, you're bagging a bargain. Besides being easy on your wallet, homemade meals can be good for your health as well. The portion size, calories and fat content are under your control. At the same time, you can serve yourself a delicious variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans that lower the risk of cancer and other chronic diseases.

The most popular lunches people purchase to eat at the office are sandwiches, wraps and salads. These can be full of hidden fats and calories and poor nutritional choices. One way to get a true bargain is to make your own.

Before you start making the central dish of your brown-bag lunch—usually the traditional sandwich—consider its main ingredient. Since about 60 percent of a sandwich is bread, find bread made of whole-grain flour. Some breads are dark brown, but there may not be many, or any, whole grains in them. Caramel color or molasses is often added to give a deep color.

Whole grains, which are much more nutrient-dense than refined white flour, are full of fiber and filling. They are rich in many health-protective substances, like antioxidants, phytochemicals, vitamin E, folic acid, zinc, selenium and magnesium. When selecting a loaf of bread, the ingredient label

should list as the first item either “100 percent whole grain” or the word “whole” followed by the grain used.

Try purchasing different kinds of whole-grain breads, if a particular one doesn't appeal to you. Multi-grain breads with oats on the outside tend to be slighter sweeter. For a wonderfully soft and chewy taste, bake your own with whole-wheat flour, or look for freshly baked loaves. Whole-grain tortillas and pita bread are also great alternatives that you may prefer.

HERE ARE SOME FAST AND EASY IDEAS TO HELP YOU PACK YOUR BAG WITH PIZZAZZ AND GOOD HEALTH.

- **Pocket Sandwich:** Spread prepared hummus inside a whole-wheat pita. Fill it with slices of cucumber, onion, tomato and green bell pepper with lettuce or spinach. Add green or black olives and a little feta cheese, if desired.
- **Mediterranean Pasta:** Mix leftover, preferably whole-wheat pasta, like bowties, with halved cherry tomatoes, sliced mushrooms, canned and rinsed artichoke hearts and green and black olives. Toss with lowfat Italian or tomato vinaigrette dressing. Garnish with oregano and basil. Sprinkle on Parmesan cheese, if desired.
- **Hearty Bean and Veggie Sandwich:** Rinse and mash canned white beans with lowfat plain yogurt, mustard and fresh dill. Spread on whole-grain bread. Top with spinach leaves and slices of cucumber, tomato and onion.
- **Spicy Chicken Salad Sandwich:** Stir low-fat mayonnaise into leftover, diced chicken or turkey. Add chopped celery, red bell pepper, halved red grapes and curry powder. Serve on whole-grain bread with fresh spinach and tomato slices.

(Source: American Institute for Cancer Research)