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Keep It Simple Healthy lunch boxes for healthy children

Children are returning to school, which also means parents and carers are back to packing lunch boxes for the day ahead. Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) is answering the questions “what should I pack?” and “how do I keep it interesting?” to provide children with the fuel for healthy growth and development.

Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) Health Promotion Officer and qualified Dietitian, Denise Chapman said the trick is to keep it simple.

“Adapt ideas to suit your child. If your child will only eat white bread, why not branch out and send a sandwich that has one slice white and one slice wholemeal. The key to getting kids to eat a wide variety is to keep offering that food to them, over and over. It takes trying a new food more than 15 times before most children will eat it,” Ms Chapman said.

“Another trick is to let your children be involved in choosing what goes into their lunch box and getting them to help pack it. So it might be, do you want carrot sticks or cucumber sticks? A tuna wrap or a salad sandwich? Cheese cubes or a tub of yoghurt?” she said.

“By letting them make the choice between a few healthy options, it gives them control of what goes into their lunch box and they are more likely to then eat what they are given.”

Warilla mum of three, Charlotte Slater, understands the difficulty faced when presented with a fussy eater. Her eldest is a fabulous eater but her middle child, Molly, is a super fussy eater. Meal times are often a battle ground as her daughter declares ‘I don’t like it’.

“With Molly starting kindergarten this year, I’ve worried about what to pack her for lunch. She doesn’t eat a large selection of foods and it would be all too easy to give in and pack chips, biscuits and a honey sandwich because I know she would eat those foods,” Mrs Slater said.

“It’s taken a while but by constantly offering Molly different foods to try, we have slowly increased the number of healthy foods she will eat. The list is still short, but because we keep giving her foods to try, it is growing,” she said.

Ms Chapman said another thing to consider when packing a healthy lunch box is what to pack for a drink.

“It’s important to pack water as a drink. Not only is it the healthiest option, it has the added advantage of not turning a school bag into a sticky mess if it leaks when the school bag gets thrown across the playground,” Ms Chapman said.

For ideas on what to pack in a healthy lunch box visit www.makehealthynormal.nsw.gov.au

Photo: Harry Slater, 7, has mini quiches made with grated vegetables, corn thins with vegemite, cucumber and carrot sticks and strawberries and watermelon. Molly Slater, 5, has a cheese sandwich on high fibre bread, an apple, cherry tomatoes and carrot sticks. Both have water as a drink.