



Lunch-Box Lessons

By Pati Martin

With a new school year upon us, it's time to play the "Will my child eat what I put in the lunchbox?" game.

The answer is yes, experts say:

"There are really many ways to make what goes into the lunchbox fun, exciting and healthy," says James Proodian, founder of the Natural Healthcare Center, Long Branch, "and it all starts at home."

When shopping, fresh is best and natural is always a better option, says Proodian, the father of four young children.

And make healthy eating inside and outside the home a priority.

"Parents control what comes into the home," he points out, "so it's important to make the best choices possible." But that doesn't mean there can't be treats.

"You need to think organic and healthy," Proodian says, "and portion size is important.

"What you feed a 50-pound child should not be what you feed a 100-pound child. It's not one-size-fits-all eating."

INSIDE THE LUNCHBOX:

Choose water, 2 percent milk or 100 percent fruit juices instead of sugary sodas and juices. If you freeze the beverage before putting it in the lunchbox, it will help keep the food cool and will defrost by the lunch time.

Peanut butter (trans fat free or low fat) and jelly (sugar-free) on wheat is a popular sandwich choice. So is tuna made with low-fat mayonnaise, and meats lower in fat and cholesterol, such as chicken and turkey.

Treats are OK in a lunchbox, but choose something healthier, like low-fat granola bars or fruit bars.

Fresh fruit, is best, but an individual serving of applesauce or canned fruit in its own juice is also a good option.

Low-fat pudding can be a special "once-in-a-while" lunchbox treat. Other special treats include individually packaged cheese sticks and plain yogurt mixed with fresh fruit.

The key to any successful lunchbox is portion control. Whether its pretzels or natural potato chips, count out a specific number of pieces based on the child's age and weight.



Sources: Dr. James Proodian, Natural Healthcare Center, Long Branch;
Cedars-Sinai Medical Center;
Miami-based nutritionist, Ronni Litz Julien