

Budget bites: Easy, healthy lunchbox recipes



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For many families, creating a healthy lunchbox that is nourishing, enjoyable, budget-friendly, and actually gets eaten can feel like a challenge. School children consume around a third of their daily food intake at school, so a nutritious, easy-to-eat lunchbox is essential.

Cancer Council SA, in partnership with KESAB *environmental solutions*, have created a series of easy, affordable and nutritious recipes for the lunchbox that parents can make at home with the kids.

These five new recipes feature basic pantry staples and use commonly thrown away items that are more affordable and nutritious than most store-bought packaged snacks which are often low in fibre and high in fat, salt and sugar.



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How to build a lunchbox

What's an easy formula for packing a healthy lunchbox?

We love the **'Go, Grow, Glow'** formula to help guide us in packing a balanced lunchbox with lots of variety. Pick one item from each category, add any extra bits if needed, pop in a water bottle and you're done!

- **Go** foods are grains and cereals that provide energy.
- **Grow** foods include meats, dairy foods, and alternatives that support growing bodies.
- **Glow** foods are fruits and vegetables that boost vitality.



Here are some ideas:

Go



Sandwiches, wraps, rice cakes, wholegrain crackers with toppings, pasta or noodles, pikelets, or dry cereal as a snack.

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Grow



Hard-boiled eggs or mini quiches, roasted chickpeas or fava beans, mini meatballs, baked beans, tinned tuna or salmon.

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Glow



Veggie sticks, whole or cut fruit, fruit in natural juice, or grated vegetables added to muffins, sandwiches or slices.

Apple pie bliss balls

Apple pie bliss, this high-fibre snack is perfect for the lunchbox.



Serves: 12

Preparation time: 20 minutes + 20 minutes to set in the fridge.

Cooking time: 0 minutes

Diet and allergies: Dairy free. Nut free. Vegetarian. Vegan.

Ingredients

- 2 large apples, skin on, grated (older apples are great for this recipe as they don't have too much moisture)
- 1 ½ cups rolled oats
- ¼ cup sultanas, roughly chopped
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Method

1. Grate apples in a bowl and add chopped sultanas.
2. Add the dry ingredients and knead with wet hands. If the mixture is too dry, add 1 tablespoon of water. (Note, mixing with a spoon will not combine ingredients like hands do, so get messy with the kids!)
3. Roll into 12 balls and place them in an airtight container. Set in the fridge for 20 minutes before serving.



Variations

Swap sultanas for currants or dates. You can use essences or other spices if desired. Pear and other firm fruits also work well in this recipe so utilise what you have and adjust according to your taste for no waste.



Serving tip

You can coat balls in chia seeds, linseeds, coconut or nuts if desired.

Cooking tip

For a softer style bliss ball, cook the apple first and blend or mash it before adding the remaining ingredients.

Storage tip

Store bliss balls in an airtight container in the fridge for up to two days.

Nutrition tips

Leaving the skin on the apples keeps their nutritional goodness like fibre and vitamin C. A diet high in fibre can help lower your risk of developing bowel cancer.

Breakfast banana balls

Pressed for time during the school week? Make these high-fibre bliss balls with the kids on the weekend, ready to eat for breakfast or add to the lunchbox for recess.



Serves: 12

Preparation time: 15 minutes + 20 minutes to set in the fridge.

Cooking time: 0 minutes

Diet and allergies: Dairy free. Nut free. Vegetarian. Vegan.

Ingredients

- 2 large bananas, peeled and mashed (those dark/spotty bananas forgotten in the fruit bowl are perfect)
- 1 ¼ cup rolled oats
- ¼ cup desiccated coconut
- 1 ½ tbsp cocoa or carob powder
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Method

1. Mash the bananas until smooth.
2. Add dry ingredients and knead with wet hands.
3. Roll into 12 balls and place them in an airtight container. Set in the fridge for 20 minutes before serving.



Variations

Swap cinnamon for nutmeg, ginger or mixed spice.



Serving tip

You can coat balls in chia seeds, coconut, carob powder, linseeds or nuts if desired.

Storage tip

Store bliss balls in an airtight container in the fridge for up to two days.

Avocado dip

Homemade dips are easy and affordable to make, plus they taste delicious. They're also healthier for you compared to storebought dips, which are often high in unhealthy saturated fat and sodium.



Serves: 4

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 0 minutes

Diet and allergies: Dairy free. Gluten free. Nut free. Vegetarian. Vegan.

Ingredients

- 1 ripe avocado
- ½ medium red onion, diced
- ½ -1 medium tomato, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, diced or crushed
- 1 tbsp fresh coriander or ½ tbsp dried coriander
- 1 tbsp lime juice, fresh or store-bought

Method

1. Mash the avocado in a bowl.
2. Add diced onion, chopped tomato, garlic and coriander. Mix well and add lime juice and seasoning to taste.



Serving tip

Serve this delicious avocado dip with pita bread turned into pita chips in the sandwich press, grainy crackers or veggie sticks. Spread on a sandwich or toast and serve with sliced tomato.

Cooking tip

Season with salt and pepper to taste. Make a double quantity for the family to enjoy.

Money-saving tip

Dried coriander can be more affordable than fresh.

Storage tip

Store dip in a reusable container in the fridge for up to two days. Can be frozen.

Nutrition tips

This high-fibre dip is a source of heart-healthy monounsaturated fats.

Bean dip

This tasty and filling dip doubles as a sandwich spread or toast topper.



Serves: 6

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 0 minutes

Diet and allergies: Dairy free. Gluten free. Nut free. Vegetarian. Vegan.

Ingredients

- 1 can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 2 cloves garlic, diced or crushed
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 lemon, juiced

Method

1. Place all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth.



Variations

Swap cannellini beans for chickpeas or butter beans. Add a can of beetroot, drained. Any leftover roast vegetables are also great in this dip.



Serving tip

Serve this delicious avocado dip with pita bread turned into pita chips in the sandwich press, grainy crackers or veggie sticks. Spread on a sandwich or toast and serve with sliced tomato.

Cooking tip

Season with salt and pepper or spices like smoky paprika to taste.

Don't have a blender? You can make also this recipe by mashing the beans in a bowl, before adding the remaining ingredients and stirring them through. Butter beans are softer to mash with a hand masher.

Storage tip

Store dip in a reusable container in the fridge for up to four days. Can be frozen.

Nutrition tips

Beans are naturally high in fibre and protein, which helps hungry tummies feel fuller for longer.

Homemade pita 'chips'

These high fibre 'chips' offer crunch guaranteed to satisfy. Easy to prepare and cooked in the humble sandwich press, they utilise simple ingredients in an energy efficient way.



Serves: 2

Preparation time: 5 minutes

Cooking time: 0 minutes

Diet and allergies: Dairy free. Nut free. Vegetarian. Vegan.

Ingredients

- 1 large wholemeal pita bread (a great way to use up any stale bread)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Season with salt and pepper, garlic and herbs (optional)

Method

1. Slice pita bread into triangles, drizzle with olive oil, then place in a heated sandwich press until crunchy (about two minutes).



Serving tip

Serve with homemade dips.

Cooking tip

Double the quantity to feed a family of four.

Storage tip

Store pita chips in a reusable air-tight container for up to two days.

Nutrition tips

Wholemeal pita bread is a good source of dietary fibre.

What is ‘nude food’ and how can I add more to my child’s lunchbox?

‘Nude food’ is food without excess packaging – without foil, plastic or other wrapping. Nude food is often fresh produce or food prepared at home. This makes nude food more nutrient-dense, environmentally friendly and often a more affordable option – a win for families.

Our breakfast banana and apple pie bliss balls are made from ingredients that are often thrown away. So, if a banana or apple comes home in the lunchbox, why not turn it into a yummy bliss ball, perfect for after-school snacks or popping back into the lunchbox the next day.

Other ‘nude food’ options include:

- cut up fruit
- homemade bread/pita bread ‘chips’
- trail mixes with seeds, nuts (if allowed), dried cereal and dried fruit
- plain, fruit or veggie muffins or slice
- homemade air-popped popcorn, stored in an airtight container.

How can I improve the chance of my child eating the lunch I have packed?

Keep in mind that recess and lunch breaks are short. Choose foods that children can eat quickly and easily, mostly with their hands.

Encourage your child to help pack parts of their lunchbox or join in with food preparation. This might include making bliss balls or dips together on the weekend, cutting up fruit, portioning yoghurt into smaller containers or preparing sandwich fillings. Helping out can make children feel more confident, empowered, and excited about eating their lunch.

Try offering just one new item at a time, paired with foods your child already enjoys. Involve your child in choosing what goes into their lunchbox, for example, offer two options and let them decide.

A commonly overlooked step is making sure your child can open their lunchbox and containers. If there are new items or your child is new to school, a little practice can make a big difference.

It’s also normal for a child’s appetite to vary from day to day. Allow your child to decide how much they want to eat.





About Cancer Council SA

As South Australia's leading cancer charity, we have been working across every aspect of every cancer for more than 90 years. Our purpose is to reduce the rate and impact of cancer for all South Australians through cancer prevention, research and support.

This collection of recipes for the lunchbox can help you and your family incorporate more nutritious ingredients in your diet. While no single recipe or food can protect against cancer, we know that a healthy, balanced diet can help lower your overall cancer risk. Home cooking means you can build meals around a variety of vegetables, legumes, wholegrains and antioxidants which are all bursting with flavour.

We hope you enjoy our quick and easy recipes. For even more healthy food and snack options, visit our website: cancersa.org.au



About KESAB

KESAB *environmental solutions* is a leading not-for-profit organisation which aims to inspire improvement, preservation and protection of our environment. We work to educate and upskill South Australians so that waste can be avoided, reduced and better managed. Our food is an important focus area for waste reduction and KESAB is pleased to adapt our conscious cooking workshops to this Cancer Council SA campaign, so we can all enjoy simple, nutritious and resource conscious nourishment. Enquiries about KESAB's offerings can be made by visiting the KESAB website, kesab.asn.au.