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## **Ampifying Life**

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### Healthy Sack Lunches

I talked in my first article about applying little improvements to our daily lives to make an impact on our personal well-being and quality of life. By making a conscience decision to be intentional about one single choice or habit at a time, it makes the change easier.

It is the time of the year when students and parents are preparing for the new school year. Not only do some youth take sack lunches, but some adults also take their lunch to work. Let's take some time to talk about how healthy food options can be part of sack lunches and ways to make sure they meet food safety guidelines.

First thing is to think about a food container. Insulated coolers with a frozen ice pack, frozen bottle of water, or frozen juice box help to keep cold items cold. If there is a microwave available, make sure the food item is in a microwave safe container if it needs to be heated to have a hot meal.

When thinking about a healthy lunch option, the first item to start with is the protein. Protein helps the body stay full and give it fuel longer. Some easy protein options include: hard boiled eggs, ham and cheese (as a sandwich or with crackers), cheese sticks, turkey wrap, hummus, peanut butter, trail mix, almonds or yogurt to name a few.

The next to add is the fruit and vegetable. Making the choice to add one of each to a sack lunch helps add to the health benefit. At any meal, think about the rainbow when you are making fruit and vegetable choices. Each color group of fruits and vegetables offer their own set of vitamins, minerals, and health benefits. Choose a variety for your "rainbow" of fruits and vegetables to ensure you are getting the vitamins and minerals your body needs. By choosing a variety of colors and textures, it increases the health benefits. Some options for vegetables to include in a lunch box are: carrots, cucumber slices, sugar snap peas, coleslaw, orange/red pepper strips, avocado, or celery. A few options for fruits to include are: strawberries, grapes, applesauce, orange slices, raisins, melon, or apples. There are many more possibilities available. Keep in mind, a juice box will not give you the same health benefit as fresh fruit, as many of these are loaded with sugar. You might choose a fruit of one color and a vegetable of another color for your lunch.

The last two groups are dairy and carbohydrates. Cheese, yogurt and milk are all high in protein and meet the dairy needs of the body. To keep the grain groups healthy, consider whole grain items. Some healthier ideas include: whole wheat muffins, homemade granola bars, Pita pockets, homemade baked oatmeal, whole wheat tortillas, baked potato chips, whole grain chips, or popcorn.

Keep in mind a meal that incorporates all of the food groups is even better. Little improvements to a lunch add up in health benefits. Don't be afraid to compare the nutritional labels of food to make decisions on options for sack lunches.

If you have any specific topics you would like to see addressed, please give your suggestions. If you ever have questions, feel free to call or email them in. Shandi Andres, Flint Hills Extension District, 501 W Main, Council Grove, KS 66846. (620) 767-5136 or [sdandres@ksu.edu](mailto:sdandres@ksu.edu)