Food for Growing Minds: A Practical Nutrition Guide for Parents

Recipes: Lunch Box Ideas

sodexo

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Foreward

The school day is long, and children need more than just a filler to get them through it - they need real fuel. This section is built around the Lunchbox Formula we outlined in the Back to School guide:

Wholegrain + Protein + Colour + Crunch

These lunchbox recipes are crafted to support energy, focus, mood, digestion, and satiety - everything growing children need to thrive from first bell to home time. We've included a mix of ideas that work for different ages, tastes, and appetites, from familiar favourites to more adventurous options that encourage food curiosity without being overwhelming.

Try our recipes that bring the formula to life:

- **Mini Quinoa & Veg Frittatas** – Packed with slow-release carbs and protein from eggs and quinoa, plus colourful spinach and tomatoes, this recipe delivers steady energy and fibre in a fun format.
- **Tuna & Sweetcorn Wholemeal Pitta Pocket** – Combines protein, omega-3s, and crunch. Served with apple slices and a small flapjack, it ticks every box from our Lunchbox Formula.
- **DIY Snack Box with Veggie Dippers & Cream Chees**e – A perfect option for picky eaters, this build-your-own format supports autonomy while delivering colour, protein, and crunch.
- **Falafel & Couscous Salad Pot** – Ideal for older children, this lunchbox option supports active kids with plant-based protein, complex carbs, and gut-loving veg.
- **Peanut-Free Chocolate Power Balls** – A sweet treat that's packed with fibre, healthy fat, and protein - great for after-school energy dips or sports days.

Many of these can be batch-prepped in advance, supporting the guide's emphasis on making mornings less stressful and reducing food waste. We've also been mindful of common allergens and nut-free policies, offering alternatives like sunflower seed butter, soy-based dips, and hard-boiled eggs to meet a variety of dietary needs.

By offering structure with flexibility, and appealing to both nutrition and enjoyment, these recipes help families take the guesswork out of weekday lunches - while helping kids stay nourished and focused.

– from the Sodexo Irish Culinary Team

Meet the Team

Niall Hill

Sodexo Ireland Head of Food

Niall has over 30 years' experience working as a chef at the highest levels both nationally and internationally, across a variety of sectors. As head of food at the award-wining food company The Butler's Pantry for 16 years, Niall won numerous awards including the Great Taste Awards, Small Business Award and Blas na hEireann. In addition to having a huge passion for quality local and Irish ingredients, Niall has an MSc in Applied Culinary Nutrition and a BA in Botanical Cuisine and has completed a postgraduate in Sustainability Leadership in Business.

Niall combines knowledge and passion with a highly strategic and practical approach to drive the highest food quality and delivery on an ethos of local, seasonal, nutritious, and sustainable food. Niall joined Sodexo as Head of Food for the Island of Ireland in February of this year and will be actively involved in the development & implementation of food offers & marketing initiatives, while driving a culture of excellence in food service delivery across the Island of Ireland.

John Core

Culinary Nutrition Lead

John Core serves as the Culinary Nutrition Lead for Sodexo, bringing over 25 years of professional culinary experience to the role. He holds a Master of Science degree in Applied Culinary Nutrition and utilizes his extensive academic and practical expertise to create dishes that are both delicious and nutritionally balanced for Sodexo's clientele. John delivers promotional pop-up restaurant concepts, culinary based nutrition seminars and one to one clinics for Sodexo client catering program.

Recently, in recognition of his contributions to the field of culinary nutrition, John was honoured with the Paula Mee Applied Culinary Nutrition Award.

Glen Stewart

Mobilisation Catering SME / Regional Development Chef

Glen has nearly 30 years' experience as a chef. Working through the years in Switzerland and Austria as well as in a number of seafood restaurants, hotels and gastro pubs between England and Ireland, he joined Sodexo nearly 13 years ago.

Glen has won several awards in competition and still maintains a passion for French cookery, as well as making novelty and formal celebration cakes in his spare time.

Cathy Adamson

Craft Development Chef

Cathy has been working with Sodexo for 30 years in various sectors of the business and has spent many years being an active member within the UK&I Culinary teams. Cathy has also spent time working with world class chefs & competing at National level to obtain several awards and accolades.

Cathy is committed to developing the culinary talents within our teams and is actively involved with the Northen Ireland Schools Programmes such as 'Future Chef' to encourage young people into the business. Cathy has a real passion for food and loves working with a product or dishes to obtain the best possible flavours, whilst maximising quality.

David Sayce

Regional Development Chef

Chef David Sayce is a seasoned professional with over 25 years of experience in the culinary industry. His career has spanned a wide range of roles, with a significant focus on 5-star hotels and fine dining restaurants.

One of the greatest privileges of his career has been the opportunity to combine his passion for food with travel. His work has taken him across the globe, including stints in Austria, South Africa, Australia, and Hong Kong, where he expanded his culinary repertoire and embraced new cultural influences.

For nearly two years, Chef Sayce has been part of the Sodexo team, initially serving as a hospitality chef for private corporate events, including luncheons and dinners. Over the past eight months, he has taken on the role of Regional Development Chef, a position that has brought new and exciting challenges. He enjoys finding innovative solutions while supporting his district, striving to help and contribute wherever possible.

Gordon Carberry

Regional Development Chef

Gordon Carberry, currently a Craft Development Chef with Sodexo, brings a wealth of experience and passion to his role. Since joining Sodexo as Head Chef in 2022, Gordon has made a significant impact through his dedication to culinary excellence. He is actively involved in the competitive cooking scene, participating in prestigious events such as CATEX, the Culinary Olympics, IFEX in Belfast, and HRC in London.

With a background rooted in the high standards of Michelin-starred kitchens, Gordon's expertise spans fine dining, comfort food, and everything in between. His deep understanding of both refined techniques and hearty, approachable dishes allows him to craft memorable culinary experiences. As a proud member of the Panel of Chefs Ireland, Gordon continually seeks to elevate his craft, blending creativity with the rich traditions of Irish cuisine.

Recipes

Mini Quinoa & Veg Frittatas

Serves: 6
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 100g Cooked quinoa
- 4 Eggs
- 50g Grated cheddar
- 6-8 Cherry tomatoes (halved)
- 1 handful Spinach (chopped)
- 50ml Milk
- 1 tsp Olive oil (for greasing)

Method:

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan). Grease a silicone muffin tray with olive oil. In a bowl, whisk the eggs and milk, then stir in the quinoa, cheese, chopped spinach, and halved cherry tomatoes. Pour into muffin wells and bake for 18–20 minutes until puffed and set. Cool completely before packing.

Tips:

- Serve with a fruit pot and a tub of natural yoghurt.
- Can be batch cooked and frozen.

DIY Snack Box: Veggie Dippers & Cream Cheese

Serves: 1
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: None

Ingredients:

- 6-8 Cucumber sticks
- 6-8 Carrot batons
- Handful Sugar snap peas
- 4-5 Wholegrain crackers
- 2 tbsp Cream cheese (low fat)
- Handful Red grapes

Method:

Assemble the chopped veg into a lunchbox section with a small pot of cream cheese for dipping. Add a handful of crackers and grapes on the side.

Tips:

- Use hummus or guacamole instead of cream cheese.
- Great for picky eaters who like to assemble their own bite.

Recipes

Tuna & Sweetcorn Wholemeal Pitta Pocket

Serves: 1
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: None

Ingredients:

- 1 Wholemeal pitta
- 60g Tuna (in spring water, drained)
- 1 tbsp Sweetcorn (drained)
- 1 tbsp Plain yoghurt
- Squeeze Lemon juice
- 1 Lettuce leaf

Method:

Mix the tuna, sweetcorn, yoghurt and lemon juice in a small bowl. Slice the pitta in half and fill with lettuce and the tuna mix. Wrap in foil or beeswax for the lunchbox.

Tips:

- Add grated carrot or chopped red pepper for colour and crunch.
- Include apple slices and a small flapjack square for a filling lunch.

Falafel & Couscous Salad Pot

Serves: 1
Prep Time: 10 minutes*
Cook Time: 5 minutes **
*** (using pre-cooked falafel)**
****(for couscous)**

Ingredients:

- 50g Couscous
- 100ml Boiling water
- 2-3 Ready-made falafel
- 4-5 Cherry tomatoes (halved)
- 1/4 Cucumber (chopped)
- 1 tbsp Fresh parsley (optional)
- 1 Lemon wedge

Method:

Place the couscous in a bowl and pour over the boiling water. Cover and leave for 5 minutes, then fluff with a fork. Stir in the tomatoes, cucumber, and parsley. Slice the falafel and layer over the salad. Include a lemon wedge for squeezing at lunch.

Tips:

- Add a dollop of tzatziki or hummus on the side.
- Can be eaten cold and holds up well in a lunchbox.

Chicken Shawarma Wrap

Serves: 4
Prep Time: 1 hour (plus marinating)
Cook Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

For the chicken

- 1 tsp Fennel seeds
- 1 tsp Cumin seeds
- 1 tsp Coriander seeds
- 1 tsp Ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp Allspice
- 1 tsp Smoked paprika
- 2 Garlic cloves
- 4 tbsp Natural Greek yoghurt
- 2 tbsp Olive oil
- 4 Boneless chicken thighs

For the wraps

- 4 Flatbreads
- 1 head Baby gem lettuce
- 4 tbsp Hummus
- 1/4 Cucumber
- 4 Tomatoes

Method:

Toast fennel, cumin, and coriander seeds in a dry pan for 1-2 minutes. Grind to a fine powder. Mix with cinnamon, allspice, garlic, yoghurt, and olive oil. Coat the chicken thighs and marinate for at least 2 hours or overnight. Grill or pan-fry the chicken for 5-7 minutes per side until fully cooked.

To assemble, spread hummus on the flatbread, add lettuce, cucumber, and tomatoes, then top with sliced chicken. Add a drizzle of yoghurt if desired

Tips:

- Marinate overnight for deeper flavour.
- Use mushrooms as a vegetarian swap.
- Wrap tightly in foil for a mess-free lunchbox filler.

Fruit Skewers with Watermelon, Strawberries & Blackberries

Serves: 4 (2 skewers per person)
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: None

Ingredients:

- 1/4 Watermelon (cut into 2cm cubes)
- 12 Strawberries (hulled and halved)
- 24 Blackberries
- 8 Wooden skewers

Method:

Cut the watermelon into small cubes and prepare the strawberries by removing the green tops. If the strawberries are large, halve them. Gently thread the fruit onto skewers, alternating between watermelon, strawberry and blackberry for colour and variety. Serve immediately or chill in the fridge until ready to eat.

Tips:

• Ideal for lunchboxes, snacks, or party platters.

• Use reusable plastic skewers for younger children to avoid sharp tips.

• Swap in grapes, kiwi or melon for seasonal variety.

• Encourage kids to build their own patterns as a fun, hands-on task.

Peanut-Free Chocolate Power Balls

Serves: 12 balls
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: None (chilling only)

Ingredients:

- 3 tbsp Sunflower seed butter (or tahini)
- 100g Rolled oats
- 2 tbsp Ground flaxseed
- 2 tbsp Honey or maple syrup
- 1 tbsp Cocoa powder (unsweetened)
- Dark chocolate chips
- 1/2 tsp Vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt (optional)

Method:

In a mixing bowl, combine the sunflower seed butter, honey or maple syrup, vanilla, and salt if using. Stir in the oats, ground flaxseed, cocoa powder, and chocolate chips until the mixture comes together. If it feels too dry, add a small splash of warm water. Roll the mixture into bite-sized balls using your hands. Place them in the fridge for at least 30 minutes to firm up before serving.

Tips:

• Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to a week.

• Great for packed lunches or a post-activity energy boost.

• Swap sunflower seed butter for tahini or soy butter if preferred.

• Let children help roll the balls - it's a great sensory activity.

Roast Chicken & Hummus Wholemeal Wrap

Serves: 1
Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cook Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 140g Chicken fillet
- 1 Wholemeal wrap
- 1 tbsp Hummus
- 1 tbsp Grated carrot
- Handful Spinach
- 1 small Apple
- 2 tbsp Peanut butter
- 1/2 Red pepper
- 1/2 Yellow pepper
- 50ml Plain yoghurt

Method:

Roast the chicken fillet with a little salt and pepper for 15–20 minutes at 200°C (or until it reaches 75°C internally). Let it cool slightly, then shred and mix with hummus, spinach and grated carrot. Place the filling into the wholemeal wrap, roll tightly, and slice in half. Wrap in cling film or foil for easy packing. Add chopped apple to the lunchbox with a small tub of peanut butter for dipping, plus sliced red and yellow pepper sticks. Include a tub of yoghurt and - important - remember to pack a spoon if your child is anything like mine!

Tips:

- Swap hummus for mashed avocado or tzatziki for variation.
- Great way to use up leftover roast chicken.
- Use bento-style lunchboxes to keep everything fresh and separated.

Edamame & Rice Sushi Bites

Serves: 2 lunchboxes
Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cook Time: 10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 150g Cooked short-grain rice
- 1 tbsp Rice vinegar
- 50g Cooked shelled edama-me
- 2 tbsp Grated carrot
- 4 tbsp Cucumber (matchsticks)
- 2 Nori sheets (cut into quarters)
- Soy sauce or tamari (to serve)

Method:

While the rice is still warm, stir through the rice vinegar and allow it to cool slightly. With damp hands, shape the rice into small discs or patties. Top each one with a few edamame beans, grated carrot, and cucumber matchsticks. Wrap a strip of nori around each bite to hold it together. Serve with a small pot of tamari or soy sauce for dipping.

Tips:

• Use silicone muffin cases in lunchboxes to separate components.

• Let children shape the rice the night before for hands-on prep.

• Add a sprinkle of sesame seeds for crunch and calcium.

Apple & Cinnamon Oat Muffins with Boiled Egg Bento

Serves: 2 lunchboxes (4 muffins)
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 120g Rolled oats
- 100g Plain yoghurt
- 1 Egg
- 1 medium Apple (grated, skin on)
- 1 tsp Ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp Baking powder
- 1 tbsp Maple syrup
- 2 Boiled eggs (peeled)
- Handful Cherry tomatoes

Method:

Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan). In a bowl, mix the oats, yoghurt, egg, grated apple, cinnamon, maple syrup, and baking powder. Spoon into silicone muffin cases and bake for 18–20 minutes until firm and golden. Cool completely before packing. Serve each lunchbox with one muffin, a boiled egg, and a handful of cherry tomatoes.

Tips:

• Freeze extra muffins for quick grab-and-go mornings.

• Use compartment lunchboxes to keep items fresh and separate.

• This combo provides long-lasting energy and steady focus for school days.

Sticks & Dip Lunchbox

Serves: 2 lunchboxes
Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cook Time: None

Ingredients:

- 4 heaped tbsp Tinned chickpeas (drained)
- Lemon juice (from 1/2 lemon)
- 2 tbsp Low-fat Greek yoghurt
- 2 tbsp Olive oil
- 1/4 tsp Paprika
- 1/4 tsp Ground cumin
- 1 clove Garlic (peeled)
- 1 Wholemeal pitta bread
- 1 small Carrot
- 1 sitck Celery
- 1/4 Cucumber

Method:

Blend the chickpeas, lemon juice, yoghurt, olive oil, garlic and spices to make a smooth hummus. For best flavour, prepare the night before. Slice the pitta and vegetables into sturdy sticks suitable for dipping. Toast the pitta if desired, then cool completely before packing.

Tips:

- Swap hummus for Veg Scrap Pesto as a dip alternative.
- Include a small yoghurt or jelly and fruit for a complete lunchbox.
- Use leftover rolls or crackers instead of pitta for variety.

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