



Pack tempting meals
kids will actually eat

Camp lunches, fun and safe

By AMY LAVALLEY

Post-Tribune correspondent

For a lot of kids, summer-time means camp time, and trading in the lunch lady at the school cafeteria for a made-to-order sack lunch.

Suddenly, moms and dads everywhere become deli counter workers, stuffing sandwiches in plastic bags and into lunch boxes. Every ... single ... day.

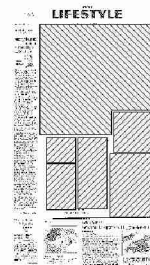
To fight that tedium for all involved, and to keep those lunches from becoming unintended science projects, Corinne Powell, an extension educator in consumer and family sciences in the Lake County Extension Office, and Janet Levihn, clinical manager of food and nutrition services at Porter hospital, offered a few tips.

First of all comes safety. It's hot out there and camps, particularly those in local parks, don't have refrigerators to keep the lunches cold.

"Food can only sit out for so long before bacteria can start to develop," Powell, a Post-Tribune columnist, said. That's two hours in moderate temperatures, and one hour if it's 90 degrees or hotter.

Since kids don't eat lunch at 9 a.m., lunch has to be kept cold for at least a few hours. Powell suggested insulated lunch boxes — some keep food cold up to four hours — and cold packs to throw in with each day's goodies. Keeping lunches in the fridge until it's time to go helps, too.

Obviously, anything made with mayonnaise needs to be kept cold. But so do



lunchmeats, cheese and even peanut butter and jelly sandwiches — jelly jars, after all, go into the refrigerator after they're opened.

Cut vegetables — carrot and celery sticks, for example — also need to be kept cold, as do cut fresh fruits. Apples, bananas, oranges and the like do not.

Anything shelf-stable at the grocery store — think those processed cheese and cracker packs, or fruit cups — does not need to stay cold if it's unopened, Powell said.

Which brings up what, exactly, to pack for lunch. Levihn said she knows lots of kids who want all their foods separate — carrot sticks in one bag and a box of raisins, for example — while others will eat carrot and raisin salad.

"It really comes down to your child's preferences, what's going to tempt their taste buds," she said.

Fruit is always a good choice, providing carbohydrates and the necessary energy for running around. Kids also get tired of sandwiches everyday, so Levihn suggested mini-bagels or cocktail rye bread for variety.

Letting kids help make their lunch may make them more likely to eat it, too. And for the sandwich-averse, Levihn suggested peanut butter dippers, some peanut butter in a small container and cut-up apples or celery sticks for dipping, as a way to provide active tykes with protein.

She also offered a sweet treat that does double duty — a plastic container filled with frozen fruit juice.

"It helps keep the whole lunch cold, but by the time they eat it, it's slush," she said.

Tips for packing a safe lunch

- Always wash your hands and kitchen surfaces before preparing food.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten.
- Include a cold source in your insulated lunch box. Use a freezer gel or freeze your drink box or bottle ahead of time.
- Take cold foods right from the fridge and freezer and pack them in an insulated cooler. If you make sandwiches ahead of time, keep them in the refrigerator/freezer until packing up to go.
- Be sure to put cold foods such as potato salad and meat sandwiches in an insulated cooler. Likewise, any hot foods should go in a Thermos.
- Don't let food sit out in warm temperatures for very long. Eat it or put it back in your cooler.
- Toss out any leftover perishable food like meat sandwiches, salad or fresh-cut fruits and vegetables.

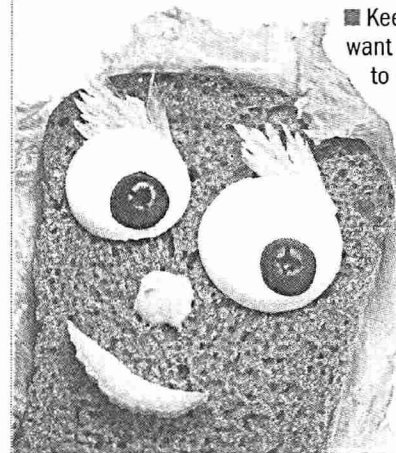
Source: Purdue University extension office

On the front lines

Call me a veteran of camp lunches. My children, at the ripe old ages of 6 and 8, are already experienced campers and have their own expectations about what they'll find when they open those lunch boxes on a sweltering day.

So, in the interest of helping other parents facing the same daunting challenge, I offer a few tips of my own:

- Ask before and after. As in, ask your kids what they want to eat, or don't want to eat, each day. And when they come home, ask if they liked their lunches and take a look-see at what went uneaten.
- Be flexible. My son could eat a lunchmeat sandwich — no cheese, no mustard — every day for the whole summer and not care. My daughter's tastes change with the summer breeze.



- Keep it light. Most kids do not want to take the time on a hot day to eat a huge meal. My daughter is fine with carrot sticks, pretzels and a piece of fruit.

- Surprise! Throw in a couple frozen mini candy bars or cookies as a treat every now and then. Write a note telling them to have fun.

Source: Amy Lavalley, Post-Tribune correspondent

Onigiri Rice Balls (Japan)

Servings: 4

- 2 cups cooked rice
- 2 teaspoons rice vinegar
- 2 ounces cooked salmon or canned tuna, cut into small pieces
- 2 dried seaweed sheets (nori), halved

Mix rice with vinegar.

Wet hands and shape ½ cup rice into a loose ball. Press ½

ounce fish into center of rice ball. Pass back and forth between hands to form triangular mound with fish in center.

Wrap each mound in a dry seaweed strip and serve.

— From *“Everybody Eats Lunch,”*
by Cricket Azima (Glitterati Inc.; \$16)

Torta (Mexico)

Servings: 4

- 1 pound shredded cooked chicken (See Cook's note)
- One 15-ounce can refried pinto beans
- 1 cup Iceberg or Romaine lettuce, shredded
- ½ cup thinly sliced radishes
- Fourth of a white onion, thinly sliced
- ½ cup salsa
- ¼ cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- 4 bread rolls, halved

Cook's note: Place chicken

in pot of water or chicken stock and bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium and simmer until chicken is thoroughly cooked, about 30 minutes. Drain, cool and shred.

Divide and stack chicken, beans, lettuce, radishes, onion, salsa and cheese evenly among four rolls. Serve immediately.

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by Cricket Azima (Glitterati Inc.; \$16)