



Sedgwick County...
working for you

Making Bag Lunches Safe

Bag lunches should be safe and nutritious. Because bag lunches will have to sit in a desk or locker for several hours before eating, precautions should be taken to keep hot foods HOT, and cold foods COLD. Plan meals to include foods that can be carried safely at warm temperatures.

3 Keys to Safe Bag Lunches

- **Good Sanitation.** Start with a clean and sanitized kitchen work surface and clean utensils. Wash with hot soapy water, rinse, and then rinse with bleach water. (1 teaspoon of bleach to 1 quart of water). Let air dry. (Sanitize means to reduce the amount of bacteria to a safe level.) Wash, rinse and sanitize thermos bottles and plastic containers after each use. Thermos bottles should also be sanitized with bleach water. Air dry. Wash, rinse and sanitize lunch box between uses. Do not reuse wrapping materials like plastic, aluminum foil or waxed paper. With clean hands, you are ready to pack your bag lunch.
- **Proper Selection of Foods.** Selection of foods depends on how you plan to store the food until it is eaten. Do you have a refrigerator available to store your lunch until mealtime? Do you have access to a microwave to heat foods? Do you own a well insulated thermos bottle that can keep foods hot or cold?
- **Temperature Control.** If refrigeration is not available, nonperishable foods like peanut butter, vacuum-sealed cheeses, dry meats, vegetables, fruits and breads keep well. Ice packs and gel freezer packs are a good investment because they can be refrozen each night and put in the lunch box to keep foods cool. You can also pack stew, soup or chili in a thermos for a warm meal in cool weather.

Safe Brown Bag Lunches

Almost any chilled meat or poultry can be used if it is not allowed to sit for more than two hours at room temperature, counting preparation time. Since most bag lunches sit longer than that, here are some suggestions to help you maintain safe storage temperatures:



Cold Food Safety Tips: Foods such as hard-cooked eggs, meat, milk, and milk products, and salads containing them should be refrigerated until just before leaving home. It's important to keep cold foods cold; that is, at refrigerator temperature or below 40°F.

Use these suggestions to help keep your brown bag lunch cold until lunchtime.

- Use a thermos for foods that need to be kept cold- milk and yogurt, for example.
- Use an insulated lunch box rather than a brown bag.
- Include an ice pack, gel freezer pack, or a small margarine tub filled with water and frozen.
- Include other frozen items such as frozen canned fruit or frozen juice boxes in lunches to keep the lunch chilled until time to eat.
- Put your lunch in a refrigerator, if available.

Hot Food Safety Tips: Remember to practice food safety when using a vacuum bottle. **KEEP HOT FOODS ABOVE 140°F.** (At 140°F, food is hot to the touch.)

- Follow thermos instructions for appropriate temperatures of foods going into the thermos.
- Preheat a thermos-fill with clean hot water and let stand a minute or two. Empty and fill promptly with hot food.
- Use a stainless-steel or glass-lined thermos bottle rather than a plastic-lined one for hotter and safer food at lunchtime.



To Keep Foods Appealing:

Wrap tomatoes, lettuce and mayonnaise separately to add to the sandwich at mealtime. This will keep the vegetables crisper and the bread from getting soggy. Spread bread with butter, margarine or cheese spread to also help the bread from getting soggy.

Brown Baggin' It?

Brown bag lunches are a traditional favorite because they are quick, convenient and inexpensive. Whatever your reason for carrying a lunch, these tips will help to keep your lunches nutritious and delicious.

- Use a variety of foods from the major food groups. Be sure to include foods that are rich in protein, calcium, Vitamin A and C, as well as carbohydrates.
- Include foods with dietary fiber, like fruits, vegetables, and whole grain breads.
- Keep calories in mind - choose foods that are low in fats, sugars and added calories.
- Choose low sodium foods, or substitute lower sodium foods when possible.



Following these tips doesn't mean giving up all your favorite foods, but it does mean balancing those favorites with healthy, nutritious choices.

😊 **Variations on a Favorite!** Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are favorites for bag lunches. For less sugar and more flavor and nutrients, try replacing jelly with fresh fruit slices (apples, pears, or bananas) or chopped dried fruit. Go easy on the peanut butter, though - it's high in fat. Choose the "no-salt-added" kind for less sodium.