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It's in the bag: five great lunches for back to school

(MEADOWBROOK, PA) – Providing children with nutritious lunches is the ideal, but then there's reality. Children have their own ideas of what's cool, and their lunch choices may not be packed with nutrition.

“But creativity goes a long way,” says Morgan Klipper, registered dietitian at Holy Redeemer Hospital and Medical Center. “Children introduced to a wide variety of different foods early and often are more likely to choose the healthier option.”

Klipper notes that with so many healthy alternatives out there, it is easy to find something children will like. For example, if children don't like whole wheat bread, opt for whole-grain crackers or air-popped popcorn. When it comes to fruits and veggies, bite-sized is best – peel and slice these healthy lunch-bag extras. Try cucumbers, cherries when in season, or apples. And as an added treat, top off that apple slice with peanut butter, which is high in protein.

Klipper also offers five creative lunch ideas that both parents and children will love:

- **Sort of Sushi.** Spread ½ cup cooked brown rice on a whole wheat flour tortilla. Arrange ½ cup cooked chicken breast strips and a couple of thin cooked broccoli spears on one end. Sprinkle lightly with reduced-sodium soy sauce. Tightly roll up and slice into 2-inch pieces. Pack in plastic wrap. Add orange segments.
- **Seashell Salad.** Combine ½ cup cooked whole wheat seashell pasta, 3 ounces canned tuna, ¼ cup shredded carrots, and enough low-fat salad dressing to moisten. Pack in a container. Add a sliced apple and honey yogurt dip.
- **Snacker's Special.** Combine ½ cup whole-grain toasted oat cereal, ¼ cup roasted soy nuts or peanuts, 1 cup air-popped popcorn, and ¼ cup diced dried apples in a plastic bag. Add ½ teaspoon cinnamon and shake well. Add a bag of cherry tomatoes and a stick of string cheese.

- Pita with PB and B. Slice open two mini whole-wheat pita breads. Spread 1 tablespoon peanut butter on each. Top with thin banana slices and close. Add a small peeled cucumber (cut into spears) and a container of reduced-fat ranch dressing.
- Turkey Toppers. Lightly spread honey mustard on four whole wheat bagel chips. Top them off with turkey slices and baby spinach and close with bagel chips. Add a bag of strawberries.

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