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# SUSSEX LIFE

November 2006

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# What's in your child's lunchbox?

Packing your child off to school with a decent lunch will help provide a host of health benefits and even make your life easier. Nutritional therapist Susie Perry explains how



## Tips for a healthier packed lunch

- Swap crisps for a packet of mixed nuts and seeds
- Swap chocolate for a flapjack bar
- Swap fizzy drinks for fruit juice or bottle of water
- Include a wholegrain tuna or chicken sandwich
- Swap cheese dips for vegetable sticks and houmous
- Include a piece of fruit

JAMIE Oliver has taken centre stage again, this time switching the nation's attention from hot school dinners to packed lunches. My heart goes out to anyone who is on a mission to help people make the link between food and health.

As a nutritional therapist I spend most of my day explaining to my clients how the foods they eat are making them sick. The reality is that you can influence your child's behavior, IQ, concentration and overall health through diet. Fewer tantrums, less mood swings, more stable energy, easier nights, better attention at school and an increased willingness to learn are all on the menu for a child that receives a balanced diet and plenty of exercise.

Among most common conditions I see in children and teenagers are acne, eczema, asthma, hyperactivity and in teenage girls, PMS. The great thing is, all of these conditions can be helped if not completely cleared.

It can be hard at first to persuade your child to eat healthier, but it's worth it. There are five main nutrients that you need to focus on. If you can bring enough of these into your child's diet whilst removing as much sugar, caffeine, colourings and saturated fat as possible, then you will start to reap the benefits and see the rewards.

## Zinc

You can't go wrong with zinc and kids. It's important for behaviour since it powers enzymes in the brain which make and maintain neurotransmitters, tiny chemicals needed for mood, sleep, memory and concentration. Zinc can also help to smooth over PMS and ease acne. Finally, zinc boosts the immune system.

## Omega 3

Children with low levels of omega-3s have been shown to have impaired brain function leading to behavioural problems, learning difficulties, poor sleep patterns and ADHD or hyperactivity.

## Calcium and Magnesium

These two minerals work together to form and maintain strong healthy bones and teeth and can help counterbalance stress. A diet low in minerals at this stage in life could predispose your child to weak bones or osteoporosis later in life.

## B vitamins

B vitamins are the power vitamins! They aid energy production and fuel growth spurts and maintain stable mood and energy throughout the day.

## Healthy Packed Lunches

All you need to do is add more of the nutrient rich foods below. Change the way you shop, don't go for heavily branded foods these often look fun and healthy but look closely at the ingredients and you'll spot the sugar, colourings, hydrogenated fats and salt.

## Top foods for kids

### Zinc

pumpkin seeds, lentils, green peas, chicken, fish, shell fish, beef, eggs, wholegrain bread

### Omega - 3

tuna, salmon, mackerel, herrings, sardines, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, flax seeds

### Calcium and Magnesium

spinach, Kale, Watercress, broccoli, tinned salmon, tinned sardines, yoghurt, Walnuts, sesame seeds

### B-Vitamins

brown rice, red rice, oats, lentils, mushrooms, sunflower seeds, chicken, kale, spinach