



University of California  
Cooperative Extension  
Tulare County

Agriculture and Natural Resources



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## ALL THE OTHER KIDS GET CANDY IN THEIR LUNCH!

Packing sack lunches give you a lot of opportunity to develop creative menu ideas based on the Food Guide Pyramid. It's also a good time to get children actively involved in nutrition.

The Food Guide Pyramid shows how everybody can make food choices for a healthy diet. The Food Guide Pyramid divides food into five major food groups: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, and meat. Each food group provides some, but not all of the nutrients and energy children need every day. No single food group is more important than another. For good health and proper growth, children need to eat a variety of different foods every day. When planning sack lunches try to offer foods from three or more of the five major food groups and encourage healthy food choices.

The small tip of the Food Guide Pyramid shows fats and sweets. These are foods such as salad dressings, butter, margarine, sugars, soft drinks, and candy. Go easy on these foods because they have a lot of calories from fat and sugars, but few vitamins and minerals.

Sooner or later, however, you're going to hear, "All the other kids get candy in their lunch." "Why do I always get carrots and fruit?" "Everyone else gets cookies and chips!" This provides a great opportunity to talk with your child about the Food Guide Pyramid and healthy choices within each food group. Talk about different foods in each group: Are they smooth, crunchy, sweet, juicy, chewy, or colorful? Ask your child to teach you what he or she has learned at school about nutrition, and then combine what you know and come up with some joint guidelines for healthy food choices. Even young children can understand

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## Page 2 - All The Other Kids Get Candy In Their Lunch.wpd

why fresh fruits and vegetables are healthy food choices and why candy and cookies are okay as occasional treats, but not as a staple everyday.

So your child won't feel deprived, let your child choose a weekly "treat day", and a treat they would like to have in their sack lunch. On other days you could include a bag of baked tortilla chips with salsa for dipping, or nonfat oatmeal-raisin cookies or fig bars for dessert.

Involve your child in planning and preparing their lunches. Children enjoy helping in the kitchen and often are more willing to eat foods they help prepare. When you pack a lunch, thoroughly wash and dry all reusable containers. Remember, that sack lunches are usually left at room temperature for several hours. Choose foods that don't need to be refrigerated and avoid foods that may spoil. Pack crushable foods in plastic containers. Wash fruits and vegetables well. Always discard partially consumed foods and drinks that may come back home in a sack lunch.

**Source:** Hermann, J. (September 2001). *Resource Update*. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension. <http://fcs.okstate.edu/publications/resource-update/09-01/update.htm>

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