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Lunch Box?
Lunch Boxes
CAN KILL



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Lunch Boxes CAN KILL

The Hazards of the Wrong School Meal

By: Dina Maaty

Back-to-School season is here and, while children are often still focused on making the most out of the remaining holidays, mothers are thinking in advance of what goes into the busy school days. Preparing a lunch box, as any mother would know, is no easy task. Between media generating contradicting information on the foods we should eat, words of wisdom from fellow mothers and friends and family, and our own conceptions, it is a daunting task to keep the mighty lunch box fun, nutritious, tasty, and safe.

mother

However, are you really aware of how dangerous a lunch box can be? Based on a 2014 study, about 20% of children in the UAE ages six to ten years old are overweight/obese, which increases to 40% in the 11+ age group.

Dr. Mohammed Zaki, director of nutrition at Lotus Medical Centre, said he had noticed a "horrible rise" in obesity in the past few years; he said his patients range between ages three to 18, with children younger than the age of 13 being more likely to be obese.

It is not only about obesity; it is also about the materials of which the lunch box was made, misuses, food combinations, and the list goes on. Here are some factors you need to look out for to keep your children safe and happy this school year:

What is it made of?

There are many components found in lunch boxes which can have detrimental health effects. For example, phthalates are used in plastic to make it flexible and more durable, but can disturb normal hormonal processes and have been linked to altered levels of reproductive hormones in baby boys.

Lead is often used as a stabiliser in PVC and vinyl products and for pigmentation purposes – and can literally be wiped off onto food and then children's hands. It affects brain development, causing learning and developmental problems, nausea, fatigue, headaches, and possibly a coma.

Cadmium, a known carcinogen, is also associated with developmental deficiencies, including hormonal effects, altered behaviour, and delayed sensory-motor development. It can cause nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhea, kidney damage, fragile bones, and death.

There are many alternatives to such lunch boxes; apart from buying from trusted sources, why not make your own with your child? You can also use reusable bags, recycled plastic, PVC-free stainless steel lunch boxes, or brown bags.

What is in it?

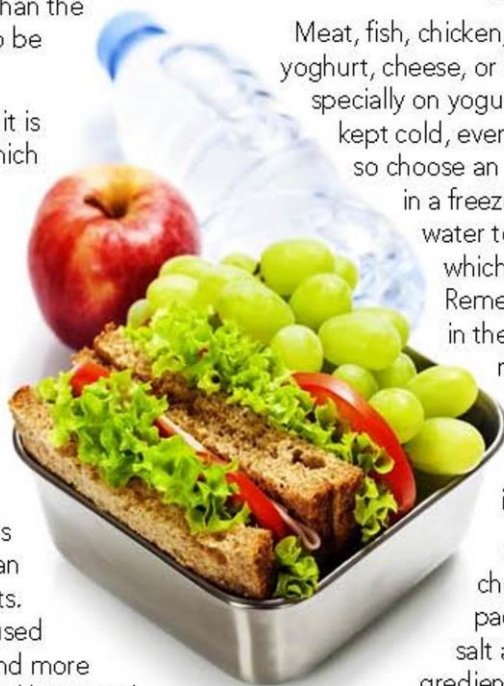
Now, as for what is in the lunch box, this also needs your close attention. Meats such as salami, mortadella, smoked turkey, and pastrami are highly processed and salty – and we are guilty of using them all the time! Your child is better off with a delicious chicken, pesto, and red capsicum sandwich; what about curried egg or mashed boiled egg and lettuce?

Meat, fish, chicken, eggs, noodles, rice, pasta, yoghurt, cheese, or milk (check the expiry date, specially on yogurt and milk) need to be kept cold, even more so in the Gulf heat, so choose an insulated lunch box or fit in a freezer pack or small bottle of water to avoid harmful bacteria which will make your child sick. Remember to keep the lunch in the fridge if you make it the night before, at a temperature below 5°C. As for warm food, heat it up in the morning and pack it in a thermos.

Alert: do not forget to check the food label on the package. If it lists sugar, fat, or salt as one of the first three ingredients, it is not a healthy lunch box option.

Are you scared of the lunch box?

Do not let what can go wrong scare you! You are doing the right thing by packing your own food and avoiding fast food, pre-packaged meals, or (some) school cafeterias. Just keep what matters in mind and get creative.



Sources:

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www.raisingchildren.net
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