

Too rushed for lunch?

Try TV dietician Nigel Denby's ideas for healthier food on the go...



We're all living time pressured, busy lives; juggling work, home and family puts huge demands on our time leaving little left to think about lunch. Despite our best efforts the reality is that around 20% of us miss lunch altogether and most of us at one point or another have to rely on fast, convenient food to keep us going. Not all fast food is the enemy when it comes to nutrition and there are some good choices out there.

Choosing healthier fast food - at a glance

You have probably seen GDA information on the front of a lot of the food labels you buy. These tell you how much a serving of a particular food contributes to the daily recommended amounts of calories, fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt. Lunch for an average woman who wants to maintain her weight should contribute around 30% of the day's GDA for calories, fat, saturated fat and salt. In real terms this is 600 calories, 21g fat, 6g saturated fat and 27g sugar. Some fast food stores now show the GDA information too which makes life a lot easier when you're on the run.

GOLDEN RULES FOR FOOD ON THE RUN

- ♥ Try to balance your fast food with foods from all the food groups – use side orders like salads and fruit portions to boost the vitamin content.
- ♥ Choose wholegrain, starchy carbs like granary or wholemeal bread, and brown rice or pasta. These keep you fuller for longer, plus they contain good amounts of fibre to help keep you regular.
- ♥ Maximise the amount of salad, fruit or vegetables you have – aim to have 2 portions at lunch time.
- ♥ Avoid extra calories in the form of butter, dressings, oil and mayonnaise – look for mayo-free options and salad dressings in sachets so you can decide how much you add.

The contributor NIGEL DENBY

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Expert tips for snacking:

For energy, one of the best foods is seeds – so low GI they don't imbalance blood sugar levels, thus avoiding energy highs and lows, says Liz Tucker, Nutritional Consultant to 9Bar snacks. "Seeds are nutritionally dense and contain many essential nutrients including omega 3. Small seeds need to be crushed to get the full nutritional benefit."

"By far the most important criteria for choosing healthy snack bars are recognisable raw, wholefood ingredients such as raw fruit and nuts and the absence of added sugar, additives or heat processing," says Jamie Combs, inventor of award-winning NAKD & TREK bars. He reckons most bars posing as "healthier options" are heavily processed confectionary. "Be wise and choose raw wholefoods alternatives."

WORKING LUNCH BOX

When you have time to make your own lunch box it's a great way to step up healthy eating; it's also good for saving money – up to £800 per year!

Here are a few ideas on how to sneak good, nutritious food into lunch boxes.

- ♥ Base the lunch box on a portion of starchy food: Wholemeal bread, pita pockets, wraps, bagels, rice cakes, oatcakes, crispbreads, breadsticks, rice salad, pasta, potato or cous-cous salad.
- ♥ Include fruit and vegetables: Easy to eat, mess-free fruit and vegetables are perfect: apples, satsumas, cherries, grapes, small box of raisins, small pots of fruit salad, small tins of fruit in natural juice, vegetable sticks, cherry tomatoes and mini vegetables such as sugar snaps and baby corn.
- ♥ Add a portion of milk or dairy food: Use low-fat crème fraiche or low-fat cream cheese as a spread or a matchbox sized piece of regular cheese.
- ♥ Include a portion of lean meat, fish or alternative. Prawns make a good low fat option or use flaked mackerel to ensure you have one portion of oily fish per week. Other good sources of protein for a lunch box include egg, houmous, bean and lentil salad.

FOOD

Lunchtime recipes that are quick and delicious

A tasty soup to warm you up and a low fat treat for afters

Brown Rice Miso Soup with Watercress

This nutritious recipe takes 3-4 minutes to prepare and five minutes to cook.

Serves 4

100g Provamel tofu
400ml/14floz boiled water
2 tsp (16g) brown rice miso paste
25g watercress
80g/2.8oz rice noodles
50g bean sprouts
20g coriander
5g/0.17oz ginger fine julienne
Splash of sesame oil

- 1 Bring to the boil a medium sized saucepan of hot water and cook the rice noodles for the required amount of time, usually 3-4mins.
- 2 While the noodles are cooking, fry the ginger strips until golden brown and stir the miso paste into the boiled water.
- 3 To serve divide the cubed Provamel tofu, bean sprouts and noodles into two small bowls. Pour in the miso soup and top with the ginger strips, coriander and watercress.

Serving suggestion: Add shitake mushrooms or try out different types of noodles such as angel hair or egg noodles.

Recipe courtesy of Provamel



Very Low Fat Blueberry & Apple Muffins

Quick to make, these muffins are really low in fat and sugar compared to most and grated apple is added to give a light natural sweetness and moist texture, so there's no need to add butter or a rich topping.

Makes 16

250g Marriage's Organic Light Brown Plain Flour
A pinch of salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
75g soft light brown muscovado sugar, or caster sugar
1 medium eating apple, about 100g (Golden Delicious works well)
275ml fat free vanilla or plain yogurt
1 medium free-range organic egg
250g blueberries
2 muffin trays lined with paper cases

Heat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4.

- 1 Sift the flour, salt, baking powder and bicarbonate of soda into a mixing bowl, and then tip the bran remaining in the sieve into the bowl. Stir in the sugar.
- 2 Quarter the apple, remove the core then grate the apple straight into the bowl without peeling. Stir in so the apple is thoroughly combined with the flour and is not in clumps. Beat the egg into the measured yogurt until thoroughly combined then stir into the flour mixture. Finally, mix in the blueberries.
- 3 Divide the mixture evenly between the paper muffin cases then bake in the heated oven for 25-30 minutes or until a good golden brown and firm to the touch. Cool on a wire rack. Best eaten within 24 hours.

Recipe courtesy of Marriages