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Makeover Your Sack Lunch **by Amy Dusek**

Everyone's obsessed with makeovers. You can't turn on the tube without catching episodes of "Extreme Makeover," "Trading Spaces" and "The Swan." So why not makeover your child's lunch?

Our Meal makeover moms Liz Weiss and Janice Bissex, authors of *The Mom's Guide to Meal Makeovers* (Broadway Books, 2004, \$15.95), took five ordinary sack lunches and turned them into healthy, kid-tested meals. Here's a week's worth of nutritionally revamped, refreshed lunch ideas tasty enough to please the toughest critics – your kids.

The Makeover Process

The makeover philosophy is simple: weave great nutrition and great flavor back into your kids' lunches. Each revamped lunch features a fiber source, a fruit, a vegetable if possible and a low fat dairy source for calcium. After you pack that in the makeover moms say you can even add a cookie or two.

The meal makeover moms love fiber. "Most children and adults don't get enough fiber. Twenty to 35 grams a day is recommended. I don't think we get half of that," says Weiss. "Fiber keeps you regular, it aids in digestion. Digestive complaints are the biggest reason people go to the doctor. Fiber is good for your heart, it lowers certain cancer risks and it fills you up. In a nation of obese children and adults with fiber in their diets are less likely to overeat," says Bissex.

A note about drinks: Water is always a wise choice. If your child likes juice, try packing a 4 or 6.25 oz. juice (100 percent juice) box with a water bottle. "Kids are always thirsty, pack them some water. They get plenty of juice throughout the day," says Bissex. A drink can also be a way to get in a serving of calcium.

Making it Happen

Both Weiss and Bissex understand what little time parents have. That's why each lunch makeover takes only 10 to 15 minutes to prepare. And you can cut that time



in half with some prep work the night before. All it takes is a little planning and before you know it, it becomes a habit.

Even with these great ideas it's easy to settle into "brown bag boredom," packing the same tired lunches day in and day out. To get out of the rut, Bissex advises to sit down with your child and come up with five or six lunch items that they like. That give you half a dozen things that are easy to make and you know that they like and you can branch out from there, she says. "Shake it up with fruit, carrots and pepper strips and different dressings."

Don't forget leftovers can make for a nutritious lunch. Weiss is a big fan of pasta salads. If you prepared tortellini the night before, use the leftovers and toss in artichoke hearts, grape tomatoes, black olives, broccoli, feta cheese and your child's favorite veggies.

"We always say there are opportunities to weave in good nutrition into every family's diet. It starts at breakfast – always serve a fruit. By 10 a.m. most kids are snacking on cookies. Take that opportunity to give your kid a healthy muffin," says Weiss. "Use every opportunity to give your child good nutrition. The benefits are going to follow."

Before: PB&J Sandwich, Chips, Two Cookies and Bottled Water

After: PB&J with Granny Smith Apples, Melon Balls and Strawberries, 1% Skim Milk

Peanut butter and jelly sandwich is the king of all school lunches. The remade PB&J features peanut butter, thinly sliced Granny Smith apples on whole wheat bread. You can also do peanut butter, raisins and banana on a whole-wheat pita. In each lunch you get a good source of fiber, protein and calcium, and a serving of fruit.

Before: Ham & Cheese on White, Baby Carrots and Ranch, Pudding Cup and Juice Box

After: Ham & Cheese Roll-ups with Dipping Sauce, Orange Slices and Bottled Water

The ham and cheese is an American lunch classic. Weiss and Bissex make it over by adding a burst of fiber with the carrots and the whole-wheat flour tortilla and switching to a lean deli ham and reduced-fat cheese to lower the saturated fat, calories and sodium. Plus, roll-ups are fun and easy to make.

To make the roll-ups, spread softened, light cream cheese over an 8-inch whole-wheat flour tortilla. Top with shredded carrots, pre-shredded reduced fat Cheddar cheese and thinly sliced lean deli ham. Roll up tightly and slice in half. And serve with honey mustard, barbecue sauce or hummus.

Before: Turkey and Provolone on White, Trail Mix, Chocolate Milk

After: Turkey All Wrapped Up, Peach Slices, Bottled Water

Turkey on bread is just boring. The meal makeover moms have added a vegetable – salsa and avocado – to give this sandwich a face-lift. Plus the whole-wheat flour tortilla adds fiber and the turkey and reduced fat cheese

bring protein and calcium to the mix.

To make the wraps, pile thinly sliced roasted turkey, pre-shredded reduced-fat Mexican blend cheese, salsa and ripe avocado slices on an 8-inch whole-wheat flour tortilla. Roll up tightly and slice in half. To keep the avocado from browning, wrap the sandwich tightly in plastic wrap.

Before: Lunchables with Ham, Turkey & Cheddar Sub with Chips Ahoy! Chocolate Chip Cookies and a Sports Drink

After: Fun Finger Food, Fruit Kabobs, Skim Milk Pudding Cups and Bottled Water

Pre-packaged lunches are convenient, but they aren't the most nutritionally sound choice. It's easy to make your own version of the ever-popular Lunchable. Try cubing or slicing reduced-fat cheese to top whole grain crackers. Add carrot sticks, red and yellow or orange pepper strips and grape tomatoes. Buy some hummus in a plastic container for dipping. There's no end to the options – you can add a mini apple sauce, toasted nuts for protein, skim milk pudding cups and all-natural squeeze yogurt. For dessert, assemble fruit kabobs. Slide seedless grapes, strawberries, pineapple chunks and mini marshmallows onto a bamboo skewer.

Before: Submarine Sandwich, Fruit Cup, Pudding Cup, Capri-Sun

After: Healthy Hero, Apple and Banana Slices, Pudding Cup, 1% Skim Milk

Containing all the traditional ingredients of a classic hoagie, this version is easier to eat and healthier. Weiss and Bissex add spinach and tomato for vitamins, minerals and fiber. They use roasted turkey and reduced-fat cheese to lower the saturated fat, calories and sodium. And the hero calls for a whole-wheat sub roll for added nutrients and fiber.

To make the sandwich, first combine baby spinach with light or regular Italian dressing. Spread honey mustard on a whole-wheat sub roll, halved. Layer with spinach, roast beef, reduced-fat provolone cheese, roasted turkey and sandwich-sliced dill pickles and sliced tomato. Place the remaining roll half on top. Slice and serve.

Chew on This: Sumptuous Sides

Does your child's lunch need a little more bulk? Add these nutritious, yet yummy side items to their lunch menu.

- **Fresh Fruit:** It comes in its own wrapper, requires little or no preparation, and is naturally packed with vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients (plant nutrients), and fiber.
- **Mini Applesauce:** Look for an all-natural brand and avoid the ones with added sugar and the fake blue, red, or pink coloring.
- **Mini Fruit Cups and Bowls:** Fruit cups and bowls come in handy when your own fresh fruit bowl is empty. Read labels and choose products packed in fruit juice versus syrup.
- **Squeeze Yogurt:** Go for the all-natural brands made without artificial colors

and flavors.

- Popcorn: Our kids love the small bags of Smart Food popcorn and we love the fact that popcorn is a whole grain. Look for popcorn made without hydrogenated vegetable oils. Popcorn isn't recommended until the age of four because it's a potential choking hazard.
- Cheese Sticks: Part-skim mozzarella cheese sticks provide high-quality protein and calcium and only 1 gram of unhealthy saturated fat.
- Pretzels: Choose whole grain or sunflower seed pretzels if they're available in your supermarket.
- Granola Bars: Look for granola bars made with healthy canola oil versus hydrogenated vegetable oils. Compare labels and choose the brand with the least amount of sugar and the most fiber.
- Carrots with Dip: Little packets of baby carrots with a ranch dressing dip are fun for kids and help to squeeze a vegetable into the lunchbox. A less expensive option is to pack a small bag of baby carrots with some dip on the side in a small plastic container.
- Make-Your-Own Trail Mix: Combine mixed nuts, raisins or dried apricots, mini pretzels, sunflower seeds, breakfast cereal such as Chex, and a few chocolate chips into a resealable plastic bag.
- Crackers: Read food labels and look for graham crackers and whole grain crackers made without hydrogenated vegetable oils.

For more back-to-school lunch and snack recipes, visit
www.mealmakeovermoms.com.

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