



## Nutri-Facts

Issue #15, January, 2002

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Greetings all!

The holiday season as we typically know it has come to a close and now the bills are arriving in the mail. The 2001 Consumer Holiday Outlook survey, taken by the National Retail Federation, expects consumers to spend an average of \$940 per household this holiday season on gifts, decorations, greeting cards and food.

For those who overspend during the holiday season, January (and sometimes February, March, and April....) can be a little lean financially. Therefore, this issue of Nutri-Facts is focused on a great way to save money and improve nutrition: by bringing lunch from home instead of eating out. According to the National Restaurant Association, lunch is the meal most frequently eaten out. In fact, the average person eats out for lunch more than 2 times a week. Almost 17% eat out 3-5 times a week and 3% eat out for lunch almost every day. At a minimum of \$5 per meal, the cost of this habit can add up faster than the interest on a credit card!

Most people think of young children when it comes to sack lunches. However, this issue was developed primarily for adults. Information on healthy, thrifty, and safe lunches is included along with a one-page fact sheet for consumers. Finally, there is a news release that you can use with your news letters or your local paper.

As always, I appreciate any comments/feedback/suggestions for future issues of Nutri-Facts.

Happy New Year and Eat Well!

Jenna

## Agent information sheet: Nutri-Facts #15, January 2002

### What's for lunch?

According to the National Restaurant Association, the average American ages 8 and up consumes more than 4 commercially prepared meals per week. Nation-wide, this translates into more than 1 billion commercially-prepared meals per week and more than 53 billion per year! Half of all commercially-prepared meals are eaten at lunch. In fact, the average American eats more than 2 commercially prepared lunches each week.

Since eating out at lunch is so popular, let's take a quick look at what this meal could cost - both nutritionally and financially. The chart below is a snapshot of some meal items that individuals might choose for lunch when eating out. Included are their costs and nutritional value. The foods mentioned are strictly for illustration purposes and are not intended to serve as an endorsement for those items. **Note:** costs of some items may vary across the state so it is a good idea to check with your local food establishments if you use these figures in a presentation.

Menu item	Cost*	Calories**	% Fat	% Protein	% Carbohydrate
McDonald's Big Mac, fries and medium soft drink	\$3.39	1030	43	11.5	45.5
KFC 2 piece chicken meal with coleslaw and a medium drink	\$5.15	870	44	16	40
Cheese enchilada (2) dinner with rice and beans (does not include chips and salsa!) and water with lemon to drink	\$4.95	1137	42	11	47
Subway roasted chicken breast sandwich with chips, a drink and peanut butter cookie	\$5.50	820	30	5	65

\* price does not include tax

\*\* drink assumes a regular soda

**Ask yourself this question:** Am I getting a good bargain, nutritionally, for the money these meals cost?

### The post-holiday budget blues

By now, those holiday bills are rolling in and some folks may be surprised to learn just how much they spent during the last month or so. This, combined with the typical one-pound weight gain that occurs during the holidays (see Nutri-Facts #14) may lead some individuals to think about cutting back - both on calories and spending. There is one way that this can be accomplished without too much pain - reduce the number of times one eats out by bringing meals from home. The results are savings to your wallet and possibly to your waistline!

## **"Brown bag" lunches - not just for kids anymore**

When most people think about bringing their lunch from home, images of PBJs (peanut butter and jelly sandwiches), milk money, and Star-Trek lunch boxes may come to mind. By the way, for those of you who have a Star-Trek lunch box (an original one made in 1968), one sold on E-bay a few weeks ago for \$561.00! Start digging in those attics, folks! All kidding aside, there is no reason why adults can't bring a tasty and attractive lunch from home. All it takes is a little planning. The payoff (i.e. the savings and increased nutrition) is definitely worth it. If a person eats out for lunch twice a week, and the average cost of a meal is \$5 (this will vary), then that is a savings of almost \$10 per week (minus food costs) and almost \$500 a year! Eat more home-prepared meals and the larger the savings will be. Keep in mind, however, that if wise choices are not made, some home-prepared lunches can be more expensive than those eaten out.

## **What to take? Components of a nutritious lunch**

A nutritious lunch contains: (1) bread or cereal, (2) fruits and/or vegetables, (3) protein, and (4) a beverage (milk, juice, or water). Try to select foods from at least 3 parts of the Food Guide Pyramid (**not** including the fats, oils, and sweets section) to ensure variety.

**Examples of bread or cereal:** bread, tortillas, bagels, cornbread, pita bread, crackers, pasta or rice (either as a side dish or as a salad), pretzels, and popcorn (instead of potato chips).

**Examples of fruits and vegetables:** fresh fruit in season (apples, pears, bananas, oranges, and peaches are good examples because they are easy to carry and eat), sliced fruit such as melon and cantaloupe, raw vegetables (tomatoes, carrots, celery, broccoli, cauliflower, and peppers) with low-fat dressing, lettuce and tomato on sandwiches.

**Examples of protein:** lean meats, fish, chicken, peanut butter, nuts, seeds, low-fat cheese and yogurt (also great sources of calcium), legumes, and hard cooked eggs. Don't limit your protein to just sandwiches; think about using leftover casseroles, pizza, soups, chili, and other meat dishes, especially if you have the means to store them safely and are able to reheat them to an internal temperature of 165 degrees (or until steaming hot or boiling).

Dessert is not a necessary component of lunch but is enjoyed by many. If one likes to have something sweet at lunchtime try fresh fruit, graham crackers, vanilla wafers, or oatmeal-raisin cookies.

## **Don't skimp on safety!**

The desire to save money should never come before food safety. Here are important tips to remember when preparing lunches for work or school:

1. Wash hands and preparation surfaces before and after food preparation.
2. Keep lunch boxes clean, wash every day after use.
3. Keep cold foods cold. Use a frozen gel pack along with an insulated lunch box if no refrigerator is available.
4. Keep hot foods hot. Use an insulated bottle for soups, making sure that the food is brought to a boil before putting it into the thermos (this is especially important if you are taking leftovers for lunch). Another suggestion is to put perishable foods in a refrigerator and reheat in a microwave when desired.
5. Wash all fruits and vegetables before they are packed.

6. Discard all perishable foods after lunch unless you have a way to keep them at a safe temperature.
7. Lunches packed in paper bags should be refrigerated as soon as you arrive at work so foods are not kept at "danger zone" temperatures for more than 2 hours.
8. If lunches are carried in paper bags, use only bags designed for lunches. Use the bag only once.
9. Before filling the thermos with hot foods, rinse with boiling water.

For individuals who don't have insulated lunch boxes or the means to refrigerate lunches, here is a list of foods that can be packed safely without refrigeration:

- |  |                                    |                           |
|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ✓ peanut butter  | ✓ pretzels, popcorn, crackers      | ✓ nuts and seeds          |
| ✓ fresh fruit & vegetables   | ✓ dried fruit                      | ✓ canned & bottled juices |
| ✓ jam, jelly, and honey  | ✓ unopened cans of fruit & pudding |                           |
| ✓ breads, bagels, English muffins  |                                    |                           |
| ✓ canned meat, poultry, and fish that can be opened and eaten right away |                                    |                           |

### **Time-saving strategies**

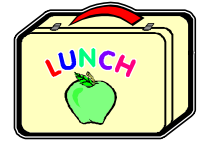
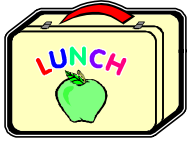
For some folks, preparing lunch seems like too much work, especially when mornings are rushed, kids need to be dropped off at school or daycare, and other errands need to be done. Below are some tips to help speed up the lunch preparation process:

1. Have a designated spot in the refrigerator to store lunches.
2. Prepare sandwiches the night before. Pack lettuce and tomato in a separate container and put it on the sandwich just before eating. This will keep the sandwich from getting soggy.
3. Cut up vegetables and put them in individual containers or plastic bags at the start of the week. That way, all one has to do is grab and go.
4. When storing leftovers after dinner, pack a portion in a separate container for lunch the next day. Put that container in the "lunch" section of the refrigerator.

### **More money-saving strategies**

As noted earlier, if wise choices are not made lunches made at home can be just as expensive (if not more) than those prepared in commercial settings. Below are some more tips to help keep lunch costs down:

1. Single servings of items (i.e. dried fruit, chips, baby carrots) can get expensive. Make your own by purchasing these items in bulk and packaging them yourself in snack-sized self-sealing bags. Pack enough for a whole week to save money and time.
2. Make large batches of soups and stews and freeze in portion-size containers for future lunches. Nutri-Facts #9 has a great recipe for Pasta e Fagioli that is tasty, inexpensive, and nutritious.
3. At the grocery store, look at the unit price to make sure a special is really a bargain.
4. Buy only the amount of food that can be used in a reasonable amount of time. Wholesale clubs and bulk items may be a good way to save money but not if the food goes to waste before it is eaten.



## Safe & Healthy Lunches From Home

Bringing lunch to work instead of eating out is one way to save money. Instead of standing in line at the cafeteria or driving to a restaurant for lunch, think about bringing lunch from home and using the spare time to relax, run errands or take a walk. Also, when you bring your lunch from home, you are in control of the foods and the nutrients you eat. Interested in saving money? Keep reading for tips on planning and packing safe, thrifty, and nutritious lunches from home.

### What's for lunch?

When planning lunch, pick foods from at least 3 parts of the Food Guide Pyramid (not including the fats, oils, and sweets section) to ensure variety. Don't limit your lunch to just sandwiches; use leftover casseroles, pizza, soups, chili, and other dishes, if you can store them safely and are able to reheat them to 165 degrees (or until steaming hot).

### Safety first!

Saving money should never come before food safety. Remember these tips when packing a lunch:

1. Wash hands and surfaces before and after food preparation.
2. Wash lunch boxes every day after use.
3. Keep cold foods cold. Use a frozen gel pack along with an insulated lunch box if no refrigerator is available.
4. Keep hot foods hot. Use an insulated bottle for soups, making sure that the food is brought to a boil before putting it into the thermos.
5. Wash fruits and vegetables before they are packed.
6. After lunch, throw away all perishable foods unless you can keep them at a safe temperature.
7. Lunches packed in paper bags should be refrigerated as soon as one arrives at work.
8. If lunches are carried in paper bags, use bags specially designed for lunches. Use the bag only once.
9. Before filling a thermos with hot foods, rinse with boiling water.

### Save time

Mornings can be a hectic. Save time by making sandwiches the night before. Pack lettuce and tomato in a separate container and put it on the sandwich just before eating to prevent sandwiches from getting soggy. When storing leftovers, pack a portion in another container for lunch the next day. Finally, have a designated spot in the refrigerator to store lunches and leftovers packed for lunches.

### Money-saving ideas \$\$\$

If wise choices are not made, lunches made at home can be just as expensive (if not more) than those prepared in commercial settings. For example, individually packaged servings of fruit, chips and vegetables can be costly. Instead, make your own single-servings by buying the food items in bulk and packaging them yourself in snack-sized self-sealing bags. Pack enough for the whole week and store. Another way to save money is to make large batches of soups and stews and freeze in portion-size containers for future lunches.

Wholesale clubs and bulk items may seem like a good way to save money but not if the food goes to waste before it is eaten. Buy only the amount that can be used in a reasonable amount of time. Finally, be sure to look at the unit price of a food item to make sure that a store "special" is really a bargain.

## News release - January 2002

By the end of the 2001 holiday season, the National Retail Federation estimates that American households will have spent an average of \$940 on gifts, decorations, greeting cards and food. For households who exceed this estimate, the next few months might be a little lean, financially. This, combined with the weight gain that some people experience may motivate us into changing our eating and spending habits. One way to save money and improve our nutrition is by bringing our meals to work instead of eating out.

"Bringing lunch from home isn't just for kids," says Jenna Anding, Ph.D., R.D., L.D., assistant professor and Extension nutrition specialist with Texas Cooperative Extension. "All it takes is a little planning and the payoff is worth it." For example, if a person eats out for lunch twice a week, and the average cost of a meal is \$5, then that is a savings of almost \$10 per week (minus food costs) or almost \$500 a year.

"A nutritious lunch should contain a bread or cereal, fruits and/or vegetables, protein, and a beverage," says Anding. Choose foods from at least three parts of the Food Guide Pyramid (not including the fats, oils, and sweets section) to help ensure that the lunch is full of variety and nutrition. Although sandwiches are a popular item for home-prepared lunches, don't forget about leftover casseroles, pizza, soups, and chili.

A nutritious lunch should also be safe. "The desire to save money should never come at the expense of food safety," says Anding. Foods such as peanut butter, dried fruit, nuts and seeds, unopened cans of fruit and pudding and canned meat, poultry and fish can be packed safely without refrigeration. Perishable foods, however, need to be handled properly to prevent a food-borne illness. To make sure that your lunch is kept safe, Texas Cooperative Extension has the following recommendations:

- ★ Wash hands and preparation surfaces before and after food preparation.
- ★ Keep lunch boxes clean. Wash every day after use.
- ★ Keep cold foods cold; use a frozen gel pack along with an insulated lunch box if no refrigeration is available.
- ★ Keep hot foods hot; use an insulated bottle for soups, making sure that the food is brought to a boil before putting it into the thermos.
- ★ Wash all fruits and vegetables before they are packed.
- ★ If using paper bags, use only those designed for lunches. Use the bag only once.

Mornings are rushed for many families. How can we make a lunch while preparing breakfast, getting dressed and getting the kids ready for school or day care? Anding has the following time-saving tips to help make your lunch preparations easier:

- ★ have a designated spot in the refrigerator to store lunches
- ★ prepare sandwich the night before; pack any lettuce or tomato in a separate container and put it on the sandwich before eating to keep the sandwich from getting soggy
- ★ when storing leftovers, pack a portion in a separate container for lunch the next day; put that container in the "lunch" section of the refrigerator

Finally, Anding reminds us to think about the cost of your home-made lunch. Commercially-packaged single servings of fruit, cheese, crackers and other foods can be expensive. Make your own single servings by purchasing these items in bulk and packaging them yourself in snack-sized self-sealing bags. Make enough for a whole week to save time and money. Other ways to save money include:

- ★ Make large batches of soups and stews and freeze in portion-size containers for future lunches.
- ★ When shopping for lunch items, look at the unit price to make sure a special is really a bargain.
- ★ Buy only the amount of food that can be used in a reasonable amount of time. Buying large quantities of foods may cost less, but not if the food goes to waste before it is eaten, notes Anding.

For more information on preparing safe and nutritious lunches, contact \_\_\_\_\_, county Extension agent at \_\_\_\_\_ (phone number).

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