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## Living Well

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### Healthy Lunches for Back to School

During the school year, many parents may struggle to find healthy foods for their children to take to school for lunch. Shopping smart and trying new ideas can help parents send kids back to school with lunches that are good for them and taste great. Consider the following tips:

**\*Focus on fruits and veggies.** Incorporating fruits and vegetables into lunches can be easy. Packing whole fruits like an apple or bunch of grapes is easy and delicious. Individual containers of applesauce, pears, peaches, and pineapples also make a tasty treat. Vegetables are another healthy addition to a lunch. Sliced cucumbers, red and green pepper strips, broccoli, carrots, celery, and cauliflower are raw vegetables that are easy to pack. Try adding a low-fat salad dressing as a dip.

**\*Spice up fruit.** Spice up fruit by packing dip for them. Low-fat yogurt or pudding is great with strawberries and melons. Try different fruits with different textures or make a fruit salad. Mix together sweet fruits apples, bananas, and pears with acidic fruits like oranges and pineapples. Kids can try different fruit combinations, and the acidic juices will help prevent the fruit from turning brown.

**\*Whole grain goodness.** Use whole-wheat bread, whole-grain pasta, and brown rice.

Whole-grain cereal is also a fun alternative to potato chips for a snack. If children still want chips, pick ones that are whole grain, baked, or possibly both.

**\*Food labels are your friend.** When buying canned or individual containers of fruit, make sure it has no added sugar and is packed in its own juice or water. Read labels to make sure products are made with whole grains. Just because bread is brown doesn't mean its whole grain. Check the ingredients list to make sure the first ingredient is brown rice, bulgur, whole-grain corn, whole wheat, oatmeal, whole oats, whole rye, or wild rice.

**\*Choose 100% juice.** Buy juices with little added sugar or sweeteners. Avoid juices that have sugars or caloric sweeteners listed as their first ingredient. Many juices are only 10 or 20 percent juice and contain a lot of unnecessary sugars. Check juice box labels and try to buy products that are 100 percent juice.

**\*Calcium counts.** Make lunches healthier by adding low-fat dairy or calcium-rich foods. About 85-90 of adult bone mass is acquired by age 18 in girls and 20 in boys. The best ways to get calcium are dairy products such as milk, yogurt, sliced cheese, cottage cheese, and string cheese as well as calcium-fortified foods such as some juices or cereals.

For more information, contact the Flint Hills Extension District office in Cottonwood Falls at (620) 273-6491 or the office in Council Grove at (620) 767-5136.