



## Who's Cooking Today? with Mary Beth Salisbury & Marie LoPresti

**Hurray! It is school time!** Children are all excited to return to school, with good reason.

There are many new adventures awaiting them. A new teacher, a new classroom, and even new classmates. Now, for the parents, it may mean new challenges. This may be one.

As school begins so does the challenge of packing safe, nutritious lunches for thousands of parents who have children in schools. So, let's ask Mary Beth Salisbury, County Extension Director, to give us a few pointers regarding safety when packing lunches. The following are some of the most common questions asked.

**What should be considered regarding safety when packing lunches?** Two important rules for lunch box safety are to keep hot foods hot, above 140 degrees and cold food cold, below 40 degrees and to keep everything clean.

**How does one keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold?** This begins with the selection of the lunch box. Some lunch boxes are insulated, while others are not. Those that are not insulated will require additional care to keep the foods at the proper temperature. Foods that are held at a temperature between 40 degrees and 140 degrees fall into the unsafe zone, and are not safe to eat after a two-hour period of time. When temperatures raise above 90 degrees this window of time for holding safe foods decreases to one hour. The next thing to consideration is the time that the lunch will be eaten? The later in the day the more that will need to be done to keep the foods at the correct temperature.

Cold packs or special containers that are designed to keep items cold or hot can be purchased, or foods can be frozen and allowed to thaw for consumption during the lunch. Drinks are the easiest items to freeze and will act as additional ice cubes to chill the other foods. Consider freezing bottles of water, juice packs or small cartons of milk if they will thaw before the lunch is to be consumed. Additionally, many sandwiches freeze well and would provide additional protection. Foods that are refrigerated the night before, even foods that aren't normally refrigerated, will be

help to keep all of the foods cold in a lunch box. The pre-packaged lunches that are often requested by children are found in the refrigerator case of the grocery store. It is important to know that these foods must always be refrigerated until eaten.

**I haven't kept cold foods cold and hot foods hot in the past and my children haven't gotten sick, why should I worry about it now?** In fact, many people have been affected by foods that were not held at the proper temperature. Often a touch of the flu or a 24-hour virus is a really food infection. Children are one of the high-risk groups that can become seriously ill as a result of food being handled improperly. Ask yourself, is it worth the risk?

**What needs to be done to keep a lunch clean?** Kitchen surfaces, hands and utensils need to be clean before and during the making of lunches or the foods will become contaminated. Likewise, children's hands need to be cleaned before they begin the meal.

Ask your child if and how his/her hands are sanitized before eating at school. A moistened aseptic wipe can be put in the lunch box as an alternative solution to soap and water. Also, lunch boxes must be cleaned on a daily basis. Many children use their book bags as a lunch box, this is not safe as they provide no insulation and are difficult to keep clean. Children often drop their book bags on the floor during school hours and at home.

**My children rarely eat all of the foods that I put into their lunch box, so I just send them to school the next day. Is that safe?** Foods that should be refrigerated should never be included in a lunch for a second day. It is impossible to keep foods in the safe zone, below 40 degrees or above 140 degrees for a full day. Consider the age and appetite of your child. Don't pack more than they can consume and only pack foods they like. If you pack foods they don't like, they will trade and you then have no control over what they eat or how the food was cared for before it was put into another's lunch box.

**It is difficult to be creative after a few weeks of packing lunches. Do you have any ideas?** Use a variety of breads or use a cookie cutter to shape the bread. Consider packing nuts, cheese and crackers or jerky if your child likes it. Write notes of encouragement on test days or reminders when they have events to be attended in the evenings. If your child likes stickers, include one as a special treat. Use special napkins, containers, or plastic bags to make the lunch more inviting. Do not forget to add the cold pack to an insulated container for safety.

The eating habits of adults begin in childhood. Consider the lunches you pack. Are they filled with fat and sugar? Do they fit the new food pyramid? Do they provide for a variety of colors, textures and temperatures that make an appetizing meal?

**And now is cooking time. So, if looking for some nutritious fun foods to begin the school year, why not try this menu:**

Chicken or Tuna Spread Sandwich on whole wheat or a chicken thigh without skin

Seasonal Fruit or fruit cup

Milk (1% or fat free) bought @ school or small container of 100% vegetable or fruit juice, and water

Here is the spread recipe for you:

Chicken Spread Makes 1 cup (4 servings)

1cup chicken, cooked, finely chopped

1-tablespoon celery, chopped

1 tablespoon crushed pineapple, juice packed, drained

One-quarter teaspoon curry powder

One-eighth teaspoon salt (optional)

1-tablespoon fat-free or light salad dressing, mayonnaise-type

Instructions

1. Mix Chicken, celery and pineapple
2. Stir curry powder and salt into salad dressing. Add to chicken mixture. Mix well.
3. Spread on whole wheat bread or stuff a mini pita pocket. Can be used to spread on whole-wheat crackers. Add a Romaine leaf or any other leafy vegetable with a tomato slice.
4. Refrigerate. Enjoy!

Variation: Tuna Spread. Use a 6 and a half-ounce can of water-packed light tuna in place of chicken. Drain the tuna before adding other ingredients. Omit salt.

For resources on food and nutrition , log on to <http://lancaster.unl.edu/food/ciq-bag-lunch.htm>, [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov), [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines), [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).

Nutrition and consumer related classes are offered through University of Florida Extension Services. You can also subscribe to their newsletter. Call 321-697-3000 for information.

Phone the Osceola County Health Department- Closing the Gap Program for information on our nutrition activities. Our free sessions in English and Spanish cover: Diabetes type 2 management for all ages and heart health (hypertension and cholesterol). The Smart Kids Program is a monthly session for school age children and their families on weight management. The numbers to call: 407-343-2082 or 407-343-2076.

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