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Think outside the (lunch)box

Packing nutritious and exciting lunches for school is a challenge for most parents, and can be equally confronting for children who expect a host of delectable delights in their lunchbox.

South Western Sydney Local Health District's (SWSLHD) Live Life Well at School Manager, Claire Southwood-Jones said healthy habits formed early in life provided a great start for kids.

"There's no better time than now to teach children healthy food habits," said Ms Southwood-Jones.

"Childhood obesity is high in NSW, with one in five children being overweight or obese.

"What's more, obese adults who were overweight as adolescents tend to have a higher risk of weight-related diseases including cancer, diabetes and high blood pressure," she said.

Ms Southwood-Jones said small changes and extra care when packing lunches and snacks could be the key to positive change.

"Considering children often consume up to 50 per cent of their daily calories at school, it's important that their lunchbox is filled with yummy, healthy choices.

"The less manufactured the food, the higher the chance of it being healthier; and probably cheaper at the checkout as well. Supermarkets now offer pre-cut fruits and vegetables for parents who are strapped for time, which are a great option for children.

"Try including fruit and vegetables wherever you can, whether it's grated carrot or lettuce on a sandwich, or homemade wholemeal muffins with dried fruit, carrot, zucchini, banana or pumpkin," she said.

Claire's top lunchbox tips:

- Think outside the box to make packed lunches fun - draw a smiley face on a banana or include a joke on a post-it.
- Involve children in packing their own lunchboxes to create excitement.
- Fruit is great, but not if it's overdone – aim for two pieces a day.
- 95 per cent of primary school children don't meet their recommended vegetable intake, so try including vegetables wherever you can.
- Swap fruit straps and muesli bars for snacks such as apples, cucumbers, carrots, sultanas, nuts, grapes or boiled eggs in separate snack-sized bags or containers.

The Live Life Well at School program provides free healthy eating resources for parents and guidance to school canteens. For more information about the program or tips for packing a healthy lunchbox visit www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au