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Flunking Lunch?

10 FOODS NOT ON THE LUNCH BOX HONOR ROLL

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Kids need real foods in their lunch boxes. Every mealtime is a chance to provide nutritious foods for a child's growing body. And yet, it is easy to be misguided by the advertising and marketing folks. Food as advertised is not always what is "cracked up to be." Don't get me wrong here; there may be some worthy attributes to some of the foods on my "Keep it Outside of the Box" list, but, at least go in with your eyes wide open.

Making my top ten list: orange juice, pretzels, water specialty drinks, gummy fruit snacks, chocolate covered granola bars, canned soups, raisins, bologna, fried chips and peanut butter crackers! Let's take a closer look...

KEEP IT **OUTSIDE** THE BOX LIST

Not from concentrate **orange juice** is portrayed in its advertisements as a fresh squeezed product, packaged days before just for you and your family's consumption. If you consider fresh, a year old product, stripped of its natural flavor compounds, then you have not been misinformed. Most orange juice that makes its way to America is a highly processed product.

Alyssa Hamilton, author of "Squeezed: What You Don't Know About Orange Juice" reveals the history of orange juice production in the United States. "There is a big gap in consumer knowledge when it comes to how our food is produced" says Hamilton. It's not that orange juice is bad for your child, it just is not what the advertisers make you think it is. Instead of packing highly processed juice, why not brown bag a juicy orange instead of juice? In addition to the Vitamin C, your child boosts their heart healthy fiber intake!

Pretzels may appear harmless; after all they *are* fat free. Healthier varieties are making an appearance on the grocer's shelf, yet more traditional pretzels marketed to our kids are made with refined flour (flour stripped of its healthy wheat germ and bran) and topped off with a hearty dose of salt. Instead of fiber free pretzels try light popcorn such as Boston Light for a bit of fiber and less salt to boot.

Specialty water drinks are designed with the adult body in mind. Vitamins added are in doses more than a little body needs! In fact, recent testing by Consumer Labs, an agency that provides independent testing of products, revealed some Vitamin Waters contain far more of the added nutrients than the label suggests they contain, making them more concerning and potentially toxic. What about those Capri Sun Roarin' Waters? At quick glance these appear to be just water with a bit of flavoring yet, these also contain sucralose, an artificial sugar. Kids deserve real ingredients.

Gummy fruit snacks may contain a speck of real fruit juice, but essentially they are nothing more than candy often made with high fructose corn syrup and food dyes. Try our family favorite: sour apple slices—cut a granny smith apple, drizzle with fresh lemon juice which adds the "sour" and prevents browning, and put in small plastic container, yummy!

Chocolate covered granola bars are like eating a candy bar followed up with a tablespoon of oatmeal. Try instead a granola bar with a bit of semi sweet chocolate chips - offering a bit of chocolate taste with less sugar and fat and often more fiber. Cindy Carroll, MS, RD, a private practice nutritionist in Lexington, MA suggests, "Look for bars that contain protein and fiber; 3 grams of fiber or more per granola bar is a good goal. Try to choose bars made with whole grains versus added fiber ingredients such as added inulin, which sometimes can lead to stomach aches."

Canned soups can be deceptive when it comes to sodium content. Given that most Americans consume double the amount of their daily recommended level of sodium, going soup-less may be the way to go. It's easy to presume one can of soup equals one serving, but more often than not, it's serving for two. If the nutrition facts label reveals sodium content of 900 milligrams, you may need to double that number if you consume the entire can. And the calories they advertise in the Progresso soup 100 Cal commercial are for ½ a can too. Who knew? Consider Progresso's Health Favorites reduced-sodium soups with less salt and lots of flavor. Our taste for sodium is a learned habit, so be sodium savvy. Minimize processed, convenience foods, as 75% of our sodium intake comes in this form.

Gatorade may have its place on the soccer field or during high endurance sports but during the school day, not so much. Research from the University of Iowa reveals sugary drinks, including Gatorade can actually erode teeth. Water on the other hand, is tooth friendly!

Bologna belongs in the deli case, not in a child's lunch box, at least not on a regular basis. Bologna is loaded with saturated fat, the artery clogging fat, and a hefty dose of sodium, not to mention the nitrites, a preserving ingredient linked with cancer, making bologna one of my least favorite sandwich fillers. Try turkey, which often offers less salt and artery clogging fat. Better bet: go for a nice Pb and J, made with all natural peanut butter and all fruit jam.

Those little packages of **chips!** Oh, yes, so convenient! Opt for the reduced fat or baked chips to lower the fat content or try our favorite, Boston Light popcorn or flavored rice cakes for an alternative.

Grab and go **peanut butter crackers** offer little in the way of good nutrition. Refined flour made crackers (no fiber here) and a mere smidge of peanut butter makes them just convenient but not conveniently healthy. Try instead, a string cheese stick, a low fat protein source and a few whole grain crackers to go with it.

Kate Scarlata, RD, LDN is a registered dietitian and mom of three children from Medway, MA. She is the coauthor of the book, *Real People Need Real Food: A Guide to Healthy Eating for Families living in a Fast Food World*, available on amazon.com.