

Strong School Days

A food-first guide for school children: breakfast, lunchbox snacks, warm caffeine-free drinks, weeknight meals, sleep and simple infection-prevention routines.

For parents and caregivers of school-age children · Adjust textures and portions for age and ability

FOOD FIRST

PLANT-BASED

PRINT + USE

A practical wellness guide — not a promise to prevent or cure illness

Evidence-informed food ideas, routines and safety notes for everyday use. Updated September 2026.

Start with the basics that matter most

No single tea, food or supplement can make a child immune to illness. A varied diet helps provide nutrients the immune system needs, while vaccination, handwashing, cleaner air, sleep and staying home when sick reduce risk in ways a recipe cannot.

A better promise

Use these meals and routines to support normal growth, energy and immune function—not to prevent, treat or cure infections.

WEEKLY FAMILY CHECKLIST

- ☐ Offer fruit or vegetables at every meal and most snacks.
- ☐ Include beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh, peas, nuts or seeds across the day.
- ☐ Choose water as the everyday drink; send a refillable bottle.
- ☐ Keep a consistent bedtime and screen-free wind-down.
- ☐ Practice handwashing before eating and after coughing, sneezing or bathroom use.
- ☐ Keep recommended vaccines and routine checkups current.
- ☐ Open windows or improve ventilation when practical.
- ☐ Keep a child home when school policy or symptoms call for it.
- ☐ For a vegan child, confirm reliable vitamin B12 and vitamin D sources with their clinician.
- ☐ Tell the clinician about every supplement, gummy, tea concentrate and herb used.

BUILD THE PLATE

½ colorful plants	¼ protein foods	¼ whole grains / starch	Add a helper
Broccoli, carrots, cabbage, greens, berries, citrus	Beans, lentils, tofu, edamame, hummus, seed butter	Oats, brown rice, quinoa, corn, whole-grain bread, potatoes	Calcium-fortified soy beverage, tahini, seeds or avocado

Warm drinks and hydration

For school-age children, plain water remains the default. A small warm drink can add comfort, but it should not replace food, sleep or medical care. Keep beverages caffeine-free and modestly sweetened.

Drink	How to make it	Safety note
Apple-cinnamon warmer	Warm 1 cup water with thin apple slices and a small cinnamon stick; steep 5–7 minutes, cool, strain.	Food-style ingredients only. Cinnamon powder can be gritty; do not use essential oil.
Ginger-citrus water	Steep 1–2 very thin ginger slices in hot water 5 minutes; cool and add orange or lemon.	Use a mild amount. Stop if it irritates the mouth or stomach.
Chamomile comfort tea	Use a labeled, single-ingredient tea bag; steep weakly, cool fully and offer a small cup.	Avoid with ragweed/daisy-family allergy. Ask the pediatrician for younger children or medicine use.
Warm lemon water	Warm water, squeeze of lemon; for children over 1, optional ½ teaspoon honey.	Never give honey under 12 months. Acidic drinks can affect teeth—offer with food and rinse with water.

Skip these

Energy drinks, caffeinated tea, concentrated herbal drops, essential oils by mouth, homemade immune tinctures and adult supplement doses.

PACKABLE HYDRATION PLAN

- ☐ Fill the water bottle the night before.

☐ Offer water at breakfast and after school.

☐ Use whole fruit more often than juice.
- ☐ For ordinary play, choose water rather than sports drinks.

☐ Wash reusable bottles daily and dry them open.

☐ Send only drinks allowed by the school and safe at room temperature.

PICK 2 OR 3

The lunchbox snack builder

Pair produce with protein or whole grains for a steadier snack. Check school allergy rules and adapt choking hazards for age.

Produce	Protein / fat	Whole-grain helper
Orange wedges or kiwi	Roasted chickpeas or pumpkin seeds	Whole-grain crackers
Apple or pear slices	Sunflower-seed butter	Oat bites
Carrot coins or cucumber	Hummus	Whole-wheat pita triangles
Berries or grapes*	Unsweetened soy yogurt	Low-sugar granola
Bell pepper strips	White-bean dip	Corn tortilla wedges
Unsweetened applesauce	Tahini-oat energy bite	Mini whole-grain muffin

*Cut grapes and other round foods lengthwise for younger children; follow your pediatrician's choking-prevention advice.

10-MINUTE PREP CHECKLIST

- ☐ Wash and portion 3 fruits.
- ☐ Slice 2 crunchy vegetables.
- ☐ Blend one bean or hummus dip.
- ☐ Bake or buy one low-added-sugar whole-grain snack.
- ☐ Portion seeds or seed butter if school permits.
- ☐ Label the cold pack and lunch container.
- ☐ Refrigerate perishables promptly.
- ☐ Let your child choose one item from each column.

Food safety

Use an insulated lunch bag with at least two cold sources for perishable foods. Discard food that has been held warm or at room temperature too long.

Fast breakfasts + weeknight meals

Berry–Oat Breakfast Jar

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup rolled oats
- ¾ cup calcium- and vitamin D-fortified soy beverage
- ½ cup berries
- 1 tablespoon chia or ground flax
- Pinch cinnamon

MAKE IT

Stir in a jar, refrigerate overnight and serve cold or warmed. For younger children, use ground seeds and age-appropriate textures.

Creamy White Bean Pasta

INGREDIENTS

- Whole-grain pasta
- 1 can no-salt-added white beans
- 1 cup frozen peas
- Lemon, garlic and olive oil
- Nutritional yeast, optional

MAKE IT

Blend half the beans with warm pasta water, lemon and a little oil. Toss with pasta, remaining beans and peas; heat until steaming.

Red Lentil Sweet-Potato Soup

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup red lentils
- 1 diced sweet potato
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- Carrot, onion and mild spices
- 5 cups low-sodium broth or water

MAKE IT

Simmer 25–30 minutes until very soft. Blend partly for a child-friendly texture. Cool quickly and refrigerate within 2 hours.

Tofu Rainbow Rice Bowl

INGREDIENTS

- Brown rice or quinoa
- Baked tofu cubes
- Steamed broccoli and carrots
- Orange segments
- Tahini-lemon sauce

MAKE IT

Layer the grain, tofu and vegetables. Thin tahini with water and lemon; serve sauce separately for children who prefer familiar textures.

A five-day school-week plan

Day	Breakfast	Lunchbox	After school	Dinner
MON	Berry-oat jar	Hummus pita + peppers + orange	Apple + seed butter	Red lentil sweet-potato soup
TUE	Tofu scramble + toast	Bean & corn wrap + berries	Soy yogurt + oats	White bean pasta + peas
WED	Banana-oat smoothie + toast	Leftover pasta + cucumbers	Roasted chickpeas + pear	Tofu rainbow rice bowl
THU	Warm oats + apple	Sunflower-butter sandwich + carrots	White-bean dip + crackers	Black bean tacos + cabbage
FRI	Whole-grain waffle + berries	Quinoa chickpea salad + fruit	Trail mix* + water	Vegetable chili + cornbread

*Use only age-appropriate pieces and follow school allergy rules.

SUNDAY RESET

- ☐ Cook one grain.
- ☐ Cook or rinse two beans/lentils.
- ☐ Bake tofu or roast chickpeas.
- ☐ Wash and cut produce.
- ☐ Make one dip and one sauce.
- ☐ Prepare two breakfasts.
- ☐ Freeze two dinner portions.
- ☐ Restock water bottles and cold packs.

Plant-based nutrition note

Children need enough calories and reliable sources of vitamin B12, vitamin D, calcium, iodine, iron, zinc and omega-3 fats. A pediatrician or pediatric dietitian can tailor a vegan plan to age, growth and medical needs.

When a child is sick

Comfort measures

- ☐ Offer frequent sips of water or other clinician-approved fluids.
- ☐ Try warm broth, lemon water or caffeine-free tea for a sore throat.
- ☐ For children over 1 year, ask the pediatrician whether honey is appropriate for cough comfort.
- ☐ Serve familiar, easy foods: soup, oatmeal, banana, rice, toast, applesauce or mashed beans.
- ☐ Let appetite guide portions; hydration matters more during a brief illness.
- ☐ Use medicines only as directed for the child's age and weight.

Get medical help

Seek urgent care for trouble breathing, blue/gray lips, severe dehydration, unusual sleepiness or confusion, a seizure, or any other emergency warning sign. Call the child's clinician for persistent fever, worsening symptoms, severe pain, inability to drink, or any concern in an infant or medically complex child.

Herbs are not automatically gentle

Many herbal supplements have not been adequately tested in children. Do not give adult capsules, tinctures, gummies, essential oils or multi-herb 'immune' products without the child's clinician or pharmacist reviewing the exact product.

SOURCES + USE NOTE

CDC — Preventing Respiratory Illnesses: [cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention)

CDC — Preventing Spread of Infections in K–12 Schools: [cdc.gov/children-and-school-preparedness/infection-prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/children-and-school-preparedness/infection-prevention)

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements — Immune Function: ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/ImmuneFunction-Consumer

NCCIH — Dietary Supplements for Children and Teens: nccih.nih.gov/health/tips/things-to-know-about-dietary-supplements-for-children-and-teens

HealthyChildren.org (American Academy of Pediatrics) — hydration, caffeine and cold/flu comfort guidance: [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)

USDA MyPlate — plant-forward meal planning: myplate.gov

This guide is general education, not medical advice. It does not diagnose, treat, cure or prevent disease. A child's needs vary by age, allergy, medication, medical history and growth. In an emergency, call 911.