

got Braces? Easy Ideas for Packing School Lunches

New backpack? Check. Pencils, erasers and markers? Check. Tender treats for sore teeth? Oh. If your child got braces over the summer, packing lunches that won't damage brackets or be hard to chew may be your biggest back-to-school challenge. Yogurt cups and egg salad sandwiches (with a freezer-pack tucked in) are excellent stand-bys, as are a keep-it-hot thermos filled with ramen noodles or chili with finely browned meat or no meat all. However, there are many more tender-teeth alternatives that will make your student (and orthodontist) smile.

An easy to carry treat is a simple jar of Hormel Vienna sausages in a pop-top can. They can go to school in their original package, or you can just send them along in a resealable container. You should also think pasta: macaroni-and-cheese is a typical kid-pleaser, but any well-cooked variety will work. Don't overlook fresh-filled tortellini, ravioli and pot-stickers (a form of Chinese dumplings), which are robust enough even for a hungry teen. Prepared the night before, all of these lunches can be surprisingly good served cold (again, packaged for school with a freezer-pack and a plastic fork or spoon).

Here are some other treats for meals-on-the-go:

- Banana slices, grape halves, and thinly cut (peeled) apples (dip them all in a bit of lemon juice to keep them from browning)
- Canned peaches or pears, fruit cocktail and Mandarin orange slices
- Applesauce or any of the mixed fruit "sauces" in individual servings
- Thin carrot-curls made with a scraper, plus a small container of grated cheese or hummus, with torn-up fresh pita bread for scooping
- Individual pudding and yogurt cups

Look for more ideas at the public website for the American Association of Orthodontists, www.braces.org.

And since few foods other than yogurt and pudding are truly "no-stick," add a little braces-care packet that can stay in the lunch-box or backpack: in a recloseable sandwich bag, combine a tiny cone-shaped, spiral-bristle brush with its self-cover (one brand is Proxa-Brush, available at pharmacies in the dental aisle), a little mirror for quick smile-checks, that packet of wax strips from your orthodontist for anything that starts to poke, and even a small toothbrush and paste. Or, buy a fully-loaded, zippered braces "survival" kit with these and other handy items at www.DentaKit.com.

A final tip for your student: drink plenty of water. It will help keep teeth clean, fresh, and ready to dazzle with that new silver smile.

*Pamela Waterman is a veteran of both teen and adult braces. She is the author of **The Braces Cookbook: Recipes You (and Your Orthodontist) Will Love** and **The Braces Cookbook 2: Comfort Food with a Gourmet Touch** (co-authored with Chef Ameer Hoge). (www.BracesCookbook.com)*

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