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CLIPPINGS

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For Immediate Release

What's for Lunch?

Christel Gustafson, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Rising Star Intern

SHELDON, Iowa -- This summer, while serving as a Rising Star Intern with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, I conducted a research-based project focused on Northwest Iowa working adults and sack lunches. I surveyed individuals from the community and from the results have compiled three easy recommendations to help make sack lunches healthier.

Surveys were conducted at two farmers markets and two local businesses. The survey consisted of the following four questions:

1. Where do you get lunch?
2. Which food groups does your lunch typically contain?
3. Do you have a refrigerator and/or microwave at work?
4. Why do you pick certain foods for your lunch?

The results showed that most people bring a sack lunch to work and have a refrigerator and microwave. They want foods that are easy to prepare and healthy. In general, there is a good variety of foods eaten in lunches, except for dairy.

Having completed the survey and research, here are my top three recommendations to improve your sack lunch:

Pack a variety! Lunch does not have to be the same every day. Switching up sandwiches and sides can keep lunch time fresh and encourage a balanced diet. During late spring through early fall, utilizing the farmers market is a great way to get fresh, locally-grown produce as well as try new foods. For the other part of the year, challenge yourself to try a new fruit and vegetable each month. You may be surprised by what you like. In addition, make sure you are getting 2-3 servings of dairy a day to help maintain bone strength.

Make it easy! Planning ahead and doing small tasks can make packing a lunch an easy, grab-and-go process. Taking time at the beginning of the week to prepare a few days' worth of lunch staples can speed up the process of making a lunch the day of. Examples of this could include:

- Cooking chicken breasts and refrigerating for later use.
- Making a variety of sandwiches and refrigerating or freezing them for the week.
- Cutting up and packaging fruits, vegetables and dips, and storing them in the fridge.

Keep it safe! Food safety is very important when it comes to packing a lunch. Always wash your hands before preparing and eating your food. Foods that are perishable, such as cut fruits and vegetables, meats, dairy products, and spreads need to be kept below 41°F to prevent growth of organisms that cause foodborne illness. To keep foods below 41°F, pack your lunch with a couple reusable icepacks in an insulated lunch box and refrigerate as soon as possible.

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Christel Gustafson, Rising Star Intern
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
cgustaf2@iastate.edu