Attractive Filler for Lunch Boxes

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"Grab your lunchbox, sis, the bus is coming," calls Harry as he races out to the road. Sis follows, and the busload of chattering youngsters is off over the hill to the fine, big consolidated school.

How different from the good old days when mother and dad trudged down the road many a cold, weary mile, with tin lunchbox in hand, bound for the little wooden schoolhouse where a lone teacher guided the destiny of a mere handful of children.

How different, and yet, in one respect, almost identically the same. The content of the lunchbox has changed very little through all the years. Although the tin pail has given way to the shiny-black lunchkit, the chances are that it contains the same ham or jelly sandwich, hard-boiled egg (with a bit of salt in a paper), a big sugar cookie, and an apple.

Lunches are a bother. They must be packed during mother's early morning rush hours when the menu is not often as it should be. However, if every mother realizes that the noon lunch is a most important factor in the health and normal development of her children, then the preparation of that lunch will take on a new interest and will cease to be a bother.

The ideal diet for growing children should contain plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, milk and eggs, only a small amount of meat, and simple sweets. It is comparatively easy to arrange a good combination of these foods at home and to have variety from day to day, but it is quite another matter to put such foods into a lunchbox so that they will be attractive and appetizing four or five hours later. The particular fault of most lunches, even attractive ones, is that they are monotonous, and monotony is deadly. One friend of mine is very fond of peanuts, but she simply detests peanut butter, because it was given her in sandwich form almost every day for a year.

George Fitch has called the ham sandwich "the great American lunch," and if one could look into the lunchbox of Iowa school children, he would know that Fitch did not exaggerate.

The sandwich we have always with us, but it need not always be ham, nor meat of any kind. In fact, for the younger children, it would be much better to make meal the exception rather than the rule. Whenever possible, use vegetables in the sandwich, especially the minerals and vitamins so necessary to the growing child.

Chopped celery or cabbage or fresh greens may be used either alone or mixed with cheese or nuts, but always moistened and seasoned with salad dressing. A slice of very crisp bacon may be used with the vegetables for variety and added flavor. Firm tomatoes, sliced, are also good in sandwiches.

Tomato butter or preserves and carrot marmalade are two vegetable sweets which are particularly attractive in sandwiches. One fault of all preserves and jellies is that they soak into the bread too much to be agreeable. Crisp sandwiches are mighty good eating, but deliver us from the wet, soaky ones. If cottage cheese is mixed with jelly or jam, it will make a firm paste which will not be absorbed into the bread. The cheese adds one of the best forms of protein and does not change the flavor of the sweet in any way.

New egg sandwiches can be invented frequently by the use of different flavors with the egg. Hard-cooked eggs, chopped and mixed with minced ham or dried beef have long been favorites. Chopped sweet peppers, shreds of crisp bacon, chopped celery or celery salt, are other flavors often used with egg. For a change, the eggs may be scrambled and either mixed with other foods, or used alone. If a cares for jelly omelet, why not make a jelly-egg sandwich by spreading jelly on the bread before the scrambled egg is added. All egg sandwiches must be carefully seasoned, and, again, must not be soaky.

If possible, change the kind of bread almost as often as the filling. The two old standbys are, of course, graham bread and white bread. Nut bread may be used occasionally in place of the cup cake or cookie, but it is not such a good substitute for the hearty sandwiches. Raisin or currant bread is always a favorite, while steamed brown bread or rye bread are other possible substitutes. Coarse breads, such as graham and whole wheat, are particularly valuable, and should be used more often than white bread.

Variety may also be secured by a change in form as well as in flavor. If one has been eating the full-sized, hearty sandwich for days, a few thin, dainty ones, cut in triangles or narrow strips, will be an agreeable change. These thin sandwiches are good without filling, or, perhaps, with just salad dressing. In this case, the "filler" may be served as a salad or preserves or a stewed fruit, packed in a little screw-topped jar.

The 12 o'clock "wash-up" preparatory to a hot lunch served at a country school.

With the discovery that such an alarming proportion of our school children are undernourished, the hot-lunch idea has spread until, at least one hot dish is prepared and served in almost every up-to-date school. Cocoa and milk soups are popular and often served, but if milk is not served at school in any form, it should be a part of the lunch carried from home. In warm weather this would be carried in a thermos bottle, which may also be used for hot foods at other times. In most cases a thermos bottle is not a luxury, but a necessity, for children must have wholesome food in good condition. It hardly seems necessary to repeat again that milk is one of the most important foods, and should be used in some form daily.

Fruit is very plentiful in Iowa, especially so this year, so there should be some form of fruit in the lunchbox every day. Bake the apples occasionally, either plain or stuffed with raisins, or make an apple salad for the little screw-topped jar. A few plump prunes stuffed with cottage cheese, nuts or marshmallows, or a few slices wrapped in oill paper may be used when fruit is scarce.

Dried fruit conserve made of apricot...
and pineapple or prune and orange mixtures the delicious either for sandwiches or for the little jar. Oranges are worth their weight in gold and should be used, as often as possible.

Heavy, rich foods, such as fat meat, pastry and rich cakes have no place in the child's lunch. The fruit may serve as a dessert or simple puddings and cakes may be used. Cornstarch or tapioca puddings may be colored with pink coloring or with chocolate, and may be varied with the use of pineapple, coconut, canned berries or other fruits. A few pieces of homemade candy are considered a treat. Fudge, penuche, peanut brittle, or puffed rice balls will keep without getting sticky if each piece is wrapped separately. It is usually a good plan not to let the children know just what is going into the lunchbox, especially if candy is a part of it. Any element of surprise adds much to the enjoyment of the lunch.

Whatever the bulk of the lunch may be, if there is plenty of fruit and milk provided, the health of the children is sure, to be preserved.