You can control breakfast, and you can control dinner -- after all, you make them -- but what about lunch? The choices end up being standing in the fast food lines, eating out of the vending machine, or settling for another flavorless sandwich that you slammed into a bag as you raced out the door. None sounds very appealing, does it?

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Make-Ahead Lunches Reduce Stress by Shane Clack, OUHSC Dietetic Intern

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The following are suggestions on how to make a healthy and nutritious lunch:

**Beware of Overload**

When shopping at the grocery store for lunch items, purchase processed foods and prepackaged products sparingly. Those items are the easiest way to overload on carbs, preservatives, sugar and sodium.

**Does It Say 100 Percent?**

Buy 100 percent fruit juice in boxes and be sure they say 100 percent juice, not just 10 percent. Freeze them, and put a box in a small plastic baggie when packing your lunch. It’s a great way to keep other items in the bag cold until lunchtime.

**The Big Gulp**

Extend that 6-ounce juice box into an 18-ounce drink without going into carb or sugar overload. Pick a soda with no calories like diet lemon-lime, or diet ginger ale, or a bottle of sparkling water. At lunch or snack time, combine them for a refreshing spritzer that is low in sugar and calories.

**Don’t Forget the Finger Foods**

Toss in a baggie full of seedless grapes and/or sweet cherry tomatoes. Baby carrots are nice too.

**Fruit Flavors**

When toting oranges, bananas or even apples, seal them in a small plastic baggie. If you don’t, the flavors of the fruits can permeate the rest of the items in your bag, making everything take on the flavor of “the fruit of the day.”

**Avoid the Fat Packs**

Variety packs of snack chips are often high in fat and sodium. Instead, buy family-sized bags of potato chips and tortilla chips that are baked rather than fried; pack them up in individual baggies in appropriate portion sizes for your individual meal plan and seal tightly. Store in the pantry and when you need one simply grab and go.

**Best-Kept Secret**

When taking a salad, place the greens in a large plastic baggie. Put the dressing into a snack-sized container, placing it into the larger one. At lunchtime, pour the dressing over the salad in the larger bag, seal tightly, and shake. No soggy salad, no messy cleanup, and no containers to tote back and forth between home and work!