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## **Ditch the packaging and freshen up lunchboxes this school year**

With the new school year about to kick off, South Western Sydney health experts are encouraging parents to take to their kid's lunchboxes to make a healthy difference.

The prevalence of overweight and obesity in school children remains a complex problem, so South Western Sydney Local Health District's (SWSLHD) Go4Fun Program Manager, Leah Choi, said small changes and extra care when packing lunches and snacks can be the key to positive change.

"Healthy habits formed early in life can stick with a person beyond childhood, so there's no better time to teach children healthy food habits than now," Ms Choi said.

"What's more, obese adults who were overweight as adolescents tend to have a higher risk of weight-related diseases including cancer, diabetes and high blood pressure."

Ms Choi suggested making simple changes like making sure you pack food that comes in its own packaging, like apples, sultanas, nuts, grapes or boiled eggs rather than packaged chips or sugar-laden muesli bars.

"The less manufactured the food, the higher the chance of it being healthier; and probably cheaper at the check-out as well.

"Considering children often consume up to 50 per cent of their daily calories at school, it's important that their lunchbox is filled with yummy, healthy choices.

"Try incorporating fruit and vegetables wherever you can, whether it's grated carrot or lettuce on a sandwich, or homemade muffins with dried fruit, carrot, zucchini, banana or pumpkin."

Ms Choi said it's also important to remember appropriate serving sizes.

"Fruit is great, but not if it's overdone and a child ends up having 10 pieces. Parents should focus on appropriate serving sizes and on food that is balanced and gives kids energy throughout the day, like healthy carbohydrates and whole grains that are really important for longer lasting energy.

"Minimise extra snacks that kids can often be tempting at the supermarket like muesli and fruit bars: they are often full of sugars, which can also harm their teeth."

Helping your children walk or cycle to school is another healthy habit to try and incorporate into your daily routine.

"Children require at least an hour of physical activity every day," Ms Choi said.

“This doesn’t need to be all at once, it can be accumulated throughout the day. If you don’t live close to the school, try parking the car a good distance away from the school and walk the rest of the way, or walk your child to the bus stop instead of driving.”

In NSW, only one quarter of children aged between five and 15 years undertake 60 minutes of exercise each day.

“If it’s not possible for your child to walk or ride a bike to school, consider some after-school activities like team sports or even encourage them to kick a ball around with other local kids,” Ms Choi said.

**\*\*MEDIA: A video featuring Ms Choi’s top lunchbox tips is available for you to share on your websites and social media platforms at: <http://youtu.be/My-5hC1J0mw>**

For more information visit [www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au)