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Pack Lunches with Antioxidant Rich Foods

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Preparing high antioxidant-packed lunches does not have to be hard, whether you're preparing lunch for yourself or for your kids. The good news is that there are plenty of mouth-watering, high-antioxidant food choices you can make – eating healthy has never tasted so good! High antioxidant snacks and meals you can pack for lunch include smoothies made from fresh fruits like berries and banana, lentil loaf, pita pocket with veggies and hummus, and vegan burgers.



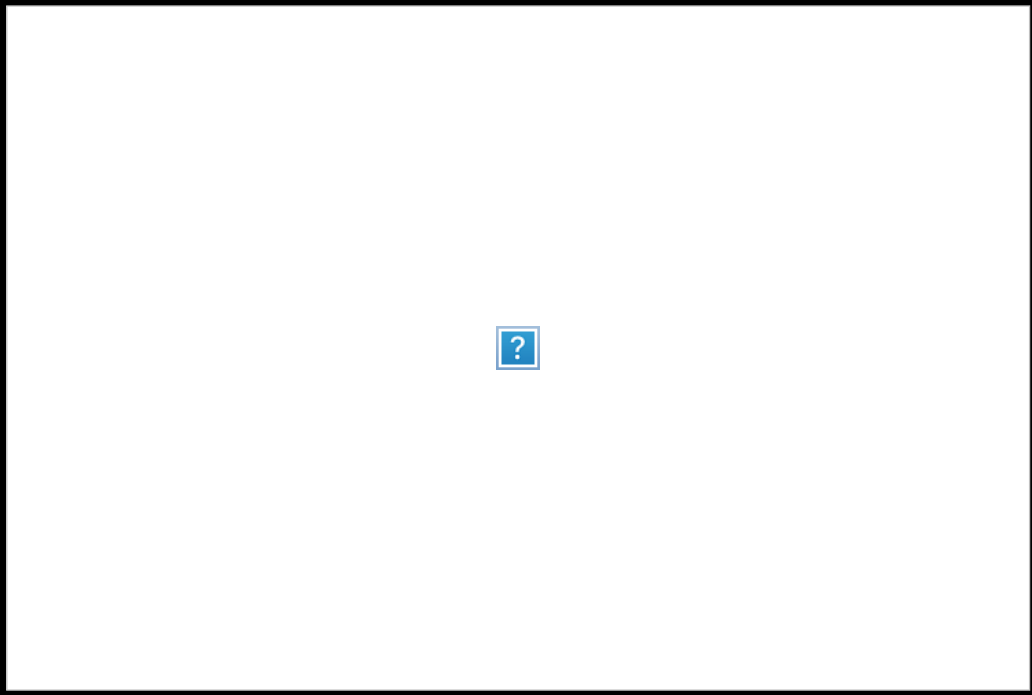
In case you hadn't noticed, most high-antioxidant foods are also [vegan foods](#). The two actually go hand in hand since plant-based foods take the goodness of the sun and turn it into vitamins and bioactive compounds you need to fight disease. As a result, [vegetarians](#) often consume more high-antioxidant foods and therefore reap their benefits than those who eat fewer vegetables and fruits. Yet whether or not you choose plant-based, the options are almost endless, so you and your kids will never be bored on a high-antioxidant lunch diet!^[i]

Quick Facts: Antioxidants and Free Radicals

- **What are antioxidants?** These compounds are extremely powerful agents of disease prevention, they prevent cell damage, contribute to cell repair, and slow down and even prevent oxidative stress, a process which results in the increase of free radicals and disease.^[ii] They are measured by their [Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity](#) (ORAC) value, and include Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Vitamin E, Zinc, Copper, Selenium, Beta-carotene, and more.
- **24% decrease in cardiovascular deaths with high antioxidant diets:** Foods high in antioxidants fight diseases and benefit both children and adults. For instance, they lower cardiovascular mortality up to 24%.^[iii] They also reduce diseases like cancer, diabetes, and Alzheimer's.
- **90 to 105+ mg of antioxidants daily:** The new Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) for fighting chronic diseases for men aged 19+ are 90 mg Vitamin C, 15 mg Vitamin E, and 55 mcg selenium. For women, the RDA is 75 mg Vitamin C, 15 mg Vitamin E, and 55 mcg selenium. ^[iv]
- **50 foods high in antioxidants:** Some foods contain no antioxidants at all, and out of 50 food products that were studied, high concentrations were found in these categories: 13 spices, 8 fruits and vegetables, 5 berries, 5 chocolate-based foods, 5 breakfast cereals, and 4 nuts or seeds – all plant-based foods.^[v] It's a vegan delight!
- **Vegans consume more antioxidants:** Vegans achieve higher intake levels of antioxidants compared to omnivores. Their intake compared to RDAs are: 305% Vitamin C, 247% Vitamin A, 313% Vitamin E, and 120% Copper.^[vi]
- **Vegetarian children healthier because of higher antioxidant intake:** 3% (1.4 million) youth ages 8 to 18 eat a vegetarian diet. These kids have lower rates of cholesterol and saturated fat, more fiber, vitamins, and nutrients, which leads to lower rates of obesity and heart disease, higher levels of energy, and enhanced concentration.^{[vii] [viii] [ix]}

Take Action! Find the Most Antioxidant Rich Foods for Healthy Lunches

1. **Antioxidant food: Berries:** Berries are one of the best antioxidant foods because they contain bioactive substances including flavonoids, tannins, and phenolic acids. These help in regulating the amount of free radicals in the body. High antioxidant berries that children enjoy include blackberries, cranberries, currants, cloudberries, lingonberries, red raspberries, and blueberries (both wild and cultivated).^[x] Berries make great hand foods for lunches and are much healthier than other prepackaged sweet snacks.
2. **Antioxidant food: Beans:** The beans with the highest levels of antioxidants include pinto beans and small red beans. Mung beans also have high levels of antioxidant with special components called vitexin and isovitexin, 96% of which are found in the bean's coating.^[xi] Cook beans into chilis, bake them into loaves, use them in salsas, or turn them into veggie burgers. The sky's the limit!
3. **Antioxidant food: Artichokes:** Artichokes also rank high in the antioxidant food list because of their high levels of folate, Vitamin C, and fiber. They're also low in calories and sodium and may help in prevention of hepatic and gallbladder disorders.^[xii] Artichokes can be made into spreads for sandwiches or sliced whole to fill pitas. They're also great in soups and on pizzas.
4. **Antioxidant food: Prunes:** Prunes have high phenolics and antioxidant activity and have been linked to a slowing in the development of age-related mental and physical problems.^[xiii] Prunes can be baked into muffins and cookies as a way of getting your kids to eat them.
5. **Antioxidant food: Apples:** If your kids love apples, be sure to choose Red Delicious or Northern Spy apples as these tend to have higher levels of antioxidants than other varieties. Also note that antioxidant concentrations are highest in the peel so never feed your kids peeled apples – whole is better!^[xiv]
6. **Child-friendly, antioxidant-rich, vegetarian cookbooks:** If you want to get the benefits of antioxidants and vegetarianism both, but don't know how to prepare lunches with kids in mind try out these cookbooks: The [Vegetarian Family Cookbook](#) or the [Vegetarian Kids' Cookbook](#). Getting your kids involved in lunch and supper preparation early will help instill in them an understanding of nutrition, especially if you explain the benefits of antioxidants found in their beans and veggies.



Dig Deeper: High Antioxidant Vegetarian Snacks and Lunches

- We've only listed 5 antioxidant-rich foods here, but there are hundreds more from which to choose. Check out the antioxidant value of thousands of foods through the [ORACValues.com database](#).

- Read more about what antioxidants have to do with cancer through the [National Cancer Institute's Fact Sheet](#).

Images By: [Dano](#) and [cookbookman17](#)

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