

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## DENTAL EXPERTS SHARE EASY TIPS TO HELP PARENTS AVOID HIDDEN SUGARS IN SCHOOL LUNCHBOXES

With around 1.3 million NSW <sup>1</sup>school students heading back through the school gates on 31 January, the ADA NSW has some tips for families who want to refresh their kids' lunchbox contents and help improve their oral and overall health.

"As parents and carers, we are busier than ever, and the daily grind of making and packing kid's lunches means that often it can feel easier to reach for convenient options that are actually higher in sugar than you realise."

"As a father of two children who take a packed lunch to school, I know how hard finding extra time is, but setting kids up for good oral health starts early in life," said Australian Dental Association New South Wales (ADA NSW) Vice President, Dr Dominic Aouad (pictured).

"In my dental practice, I see firsthand the impacts of daily sugar consumption. We know that many popular and convenient lunchbox items are high in sugar, causing tooth decay or gum disease over time. This can lead to more invasive dental treatments for children such as fillings and early extractions and also contribute to greater hospitalisations and chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes later down the track."

Parents may be surprised to know that for example, a lunch that includes dried apricots, a flavoured yogurt, and a fruit juice box is delivering more than double the recommended daily amount of sugar. Limiting sugar consumption is key to preventing tooth decay, which is the most common chronic disease in childhood.

Around 1 in 4 (24%) Australian children aged 6–14 had dental caries in their permanent teeth, and around 1 in 10 (11%) had at least one permanent tooth with untreated decay, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (March 2022).<sup>2</sup>

### THE ADA NSW'S EASY TIPS FOR TOOTH-FRIENDLY LUNCHBOXES:

- Include something from each of the five food groups including fruit/vegetables/legumes/beans, dairy, grain (cereal) foods and lean meats poultry/fish/eggs. E.g., cheese sticks hard-boiled eggs
- Replace chips, chocolates, muesli bars, and sweet biscuits with items such as fresh fruit, celery and carrot sticks, and cucumbers.
- Limit snacks that are high in sugar and/or saturated fats e.g. donuts
- Pick whole fruit over fruit juice – the vitamins, minerals and fibre make it more filling and nutritious and reduce the sugar content per serve.
- Pack water as your school drink rather than sports drinks, juice, soft drinks, cordials or flavoured milk which are high in sugar. If your tap water is fluoridated even better!
  - Look for grain-based snacks with whole grains and high fibre, such as wholegrain bread and crackers.
- Processed snack products such as muesli and breakfast bars, chips, and cookies should be limited to one item and ideally a low-sugar choice, such as rice crackers, popcorn and cheese.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [Schools, 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://abs.gov.au/australia-in-a-nutshell/schools-2021)

<sup>2</sup> Source: [Oral health and dental care in Australia, Healthy teeth - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://aihw.gov.au/australia-in-a-nutshell/oral-health-and-dental-care-in-australia)

**About:** ADA NSW is the peak body representing dentists and dental students in NSW and the ACT, with more than 5,000 members. We have been supporting dentists and promoting good oral health in the community since 1929.

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“As well as packing a tooth-friendly lunchbox, parents should ensure their child visits a dentist at least once a year for a check-up as maintaining good oral health improves overall health outcomes for your life,” said Dr Aouad.

Brushing teeth twice a day, flossing and drinking tap water in place of other drinks are also easy ways to help protect oral health among people of all ages. Checking the labelling of packaged items before buying to see their real sugar content is a quick way to gauge what should be included or not in school lunchboxes.

ADDED CHILDHOOD ORAL HEALTH STATS (Courtesy the Australian Oral Health Tracker):

- Poor oral health in childhood is the strongest predictor of further dental disease in adulthood
- About 70% of children aged 9-13 are consuming too much sugar
- Oral diseases such as tooth decay, gum disease and oral cancer contribute to illness, disability and death in Australia.

**PHOTO CAPTION:** Parents need to be aware of the hidden sugars lurking in their child's lunch box. ADA NSW Vice President Dr Dominic Aouad and his dentist wife Dr Melanie Patney and their two children Leon aged 4 and Rohan aged 6.

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