

PORTABLE LUNCHES

By Julie Cottrell, MS, RD, LD

Lower carb, protein-rich recipes to inspire some tasty, health-promoting, home-cooked meals!

Recipe ideas will fall into a variety of categories:

- ❖ soup/ soup + half sandwich
- ❖ sandwich/wrap
- ❖ salad
- ❖ protein shake
- ❖ leftovers
- ❖ meal prep
- ❖ frozen meals (higher quality ones)
- ❖ mix and match



For all options:

Make it feel like a
complete MEAL
and *not* like a SNACK.

SOUP

Make your own soup or buy premade versions. Note that quality premade soups are pricey; and you may need to add more protein (either directly to the soup or as a half sandwich) to truly make a meal out of it. Make the best choices you can based on where you shop and what your budget will allow.

PRE-MADE SOUPS: Examples of top quality options:

				
<u>Proper Good</u> Broccoli Cheddar Soup	<u>Proper Good</u> Sweet Red Pepper and Meatball Soup	<u>Proper Good</u> Chicken and Mushroom Soup	<u>Kettle and Fire</u> Broccoli Cheddar Soup	<u>Kettle and Fire</u> Mushroom Bisque Soup
Maybe add some diced chicken to this to increase the protein.	Has 17 grams protein; could add a few more meatballs like these .	Add some chicken or eat along with half of a protein wrap.	Very pricey; buy in a bundle to save \$\$\$. Split the container over 2 days; serve along with a wrap.	

Other brands to consider:

Amy's	The brand is good but most options may be higher in carbs than your carb budget.
Annie's	Annie's uses higher quality ingredients; might be a good choice for kids.
Great Value Organic	These are decent quality but most flavors are higher in carbs and <i>may</i> have soybean oil.
Pacific	The brand is good. Check the carbs; maybe have a cup with a protein wrap.
Wolfgang Puck	High quality ingredients. Check the carbs; maybe serve with another protein source.






HOMEMADE SOUP

You may save \$\$ by making your own, and you definitely have greater control of the ingredients. Recipes for lower-carb or keto soup are all over the internet. We will focus on recipes found at two different websites below, as examples.

www.LowCarbSpark.com

This is an outstanding website, not only for soup, but for breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, desserts, drinks and more. The website creator has done a fabulous job of displaying mouth-watering pictures featuring lower carb recipes that aren't too difficult to make. Ingredients are ones you will use repeatedly once you learn to stock them up.






Examples of soup recipes found on her website:

				
<u>Zuppa Toscana</u>	<u>Keto Beef Stew</u>	<u>Broccoli Cheese</u>	<u>Creamy White Chicken Chili</u>	<u>Unstuffed Cabbage Roll Soup</u>

www.WholesomeYum.com

This is also an outstanding website, loaded with recipes that whole families can enjoy. Be careful to select the low carb or keto recipes if your goal is to keep carbs low. She includes videos and lots of pics too. Highly recommend it!






Examples of soup recipes found on her website:

				
<u>Low Carb/Keto Chili</u>	<u>Keto Chicken Tortilla Soup</u>	<u>Chicken Pot Pie Soup</u>	<u>Keto Gumbo Recipe</u>	<u>Keto Bacon Cheeseburger Soup</u>

Experiment with these recipes to see what suits you and your family. Eat soup by itself or pair it up with something else to make a complete meal. Soups are an easy item to cook in bulk. Find one that looks good, prepare it over the weekend, then enjoy it as part of your lunch during the week. Soups usually freeze well too, so they are great as part of a “meal prep” strategy.







SANDWICHES AND WRAPS

WRAP OPTIONS:

Low Carb Tortilla	Lettuce	Cabbage or Collards	Bread Alternatives	Bread
				
There are a variety of lower carb tortillas to choose from. Look for ones with fiber, the least amount of calories, and without unfavorable oils. See next page for options.	Several lettuce varieties work well. Iceberg and Romaine provide “crunch” and keep well in the fridge. Butter lettuce is soft and pliable but has a shorter shelf life.	Red, green or purple cabbage work well. Cut off a wedge, then pull apart into manageable pieces. Collards also work if you heat them first.	Gluten-free and/or “Ket”o breads are out there. Read ingredients lists. Some contain <u>unfavorable oils</u> .	Sprouted grain, sourdough and rye are the best regular bread options. Bread may be an option, depending on your daily carb budget.

Storage Tip: Store bread in the freezer to keep it fresh; remove the amount needed as you go along. Tortillas stay fresh in the pantry for a good while. Romaine keeps well in the fridge for at least a week; cabbage will stay fresh in the fridge even longer!






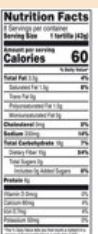
MIX AND MATCH FILLINGS:

Category	Examples	Comments	Pictures
Protein Source	turkey, chicken, roast beef, ham, salami, pepperoni, Canadian bacon, grilled or rotisserie chicken, tuna, salmon (canned, fresh or smoked)	Boar's Head is a really good brand for deli meat. Avoid ones with added sugars. Minimize salt. Shorter ingredient lists.	
Healthy Fats	avocado or guacamole, avocado-based mayo, olive oil or olive-oil based dressing	Slice the avocado or smash it onto the wrap; make sure your mayo doesn't have soybean oil	
Cheese	provolone, swiss, cheddar, monterey jack, mozzarella, blue cheese, feta, cream cheese, cottage cheese	Thin slices can work really well; and try Laughing Cow brand for a low-fat cream cheese in a variety of flavors.	
Veggies	onion, cucumber, zucchini, tomato, shredded carrot, bell pepper, spinach, slaw	Provides texture and crunch; experiment with different ways of slicing them.	
Savory Additions	roasted red peppers, olives, pickles, sun-dried tomatoes, kimchi, salsa, Buffalo/hot sauce	Buy in jars; remove the portion you want; drain/pat dry or remove excess liquid before adding to your wrap.	
Condiments	mustard (many varieties), mayo, salt, pepper, herbs/spices, Mrs. Dash/mixed seasonings, pesto	While ketchup and barbeque sauce have carbs in them, most mustard varieties are a good option.	

A CLOSER LOOK AT TORTILLAS AND WRAP OPTIONS

New versions of tortillas and wrap options show up at the grocery daily; there is a huge market for these. You can find ones made from various combinations of wheat, whole grains, and chia seeds; ones that include spinach (and look/seem “healthier”); gluten-free versions made from rice, coconut or almond flour or cauliflower; and alternatives made from [egg whites](#) or [cheese](#). A few examples are shown below to demonstrate some valuable qualities as well as a note of things we want to avoid.

LOW CARB TORTILLA COMPARISON (green = good; orange = avoid):

Extreme Wellness Wrap		La Banderita		Mission Carb Balance	
					
<p>Water, Modified Wheat Starch, Wheat Protein, Cellulose, Whole Wheat, Contains 2% or Less of the Following: Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Salt, Xanthan Gum, Ground Flax Seed, Aluminum-free Leavening (Sodium Bicarbonate, Corn Starch, Monocalcium Phosphate), Preservatives (Calcium Propionate, Sorbic Acid), Dough Conditioner (Fumaric Acid, Mono-and Diglycerides, Sodium Metabisulphite)</p>		<p>INGREDIENTS: Water, Modified wheat starch, Wheat protein, Cellulose, Enriched unbleached flour (Wheat flour, Niacin, Reduced iron, Thiamine mononitrate, Riboflavin and Folic acid). Contains 2% or less of the following: Extra virgin olive oil, Salt, Xanthan Gum, Sorbic Acid, Aluminum-free leavening (Sodium bicarbonate, Corn starch, Monocalcium phosphate), Preservatives (Calcium propionate, Sorbic acid), Dough conditioner (Fumaric Acid, Mono-and Diglycerides, Sodium metabisulphite). Contains Wheat.</p>		<p>INGREDIENTS: WATER, MODIFIED WHEAT STARCH, WHOLE WHEAT FLOUR, WHEAT GLUTEN, VEGETABLE SHORTENING (INTERESTERIFIED AND HYDROGENATED SOYBEAN OILS), WHEAT GLUTEN ISOLATE, CONTAINS 2% OR LESS OF: SPINACH POWDER, SALT, ONION POWDER, SPICES, GARLIC POWDER, SUNFLOWER OIL, YELLOW 5 ALUMINUM LAKE, BLUE 1 ALUMINUM LAKE, BAKING SODA, SODIUM ACID PYROPHOSPHATE, CELLULOSE GUM, DISTILLED MONOGLYCERIDES, SUCRALOSE, FUMARIC ACID, AND CALCIUM PROPIONATE AND SORBIC ACID (TO MAINTAIN FRESHNESS). CONTAINS: WHEAT</p>	
<p>No soybean oil; this one has EVOO instead. Flax seeds are a source of healthy fats. Uses aluminum-free leavening. For carb-counting, ok to subtract the fiber; 15-11 = 4 g net carbs</p>		<p>This one is similar to the Extreme Wellness Wrap. Low in carbs, lots of fiber. As long as you tolerate wheat, either of these options (or ones just like these) is a good choice.</p>		<p>This is a popular brand, and certainly looks healthy (made with spinach). But it contains soybean oil and yellow dye #5, blue #1 and aluminum. DO NOT BUY!!</p>	

Are gluten-free options better?

If you don't tolerate gluten, yes. If you tolerate gluten, you will likely do better with the **green versions** above. Gluten-free ones use a variety of alternative flours in place of wheat; but the carb count is usually MUCH higher; and there are often lots more **unfavorable ingredients**.

Read labels for INGREDIENTS, not just the nutrition facts.

Look out for **soybean oil** (hydrogenated or not); **food coloring/dyes**; **aluminum**; **sucralose**; **caramel coloring**; as well as **too many carbs**. Find flavors you enjoy. It IS fine to get ones with bonus ingredients like flax seeds, chia seeds, pea protein, etc. Xanthan gum is an acceptable ingredient (it's a thickener).

Some specific brands to consider (besides the ones listed above) based on these standards:

[NuCo Organic Coconut Wraps](#); [Maria & Ricardo's Almond Flour Tortillas](#) (this brand is good; other flavors are good too); [LaTortilla Factory Tortillas](#)

Note: Carb amounts will vary, so pay attention; select ones that are within your daily carb budget. And if you don't tolerate wheat, ones made from coconut or almond flours may be worth the expense.

Some specific ones to avoid based on these standards:

[Mission Protein Plant Powered](#); [Mission Carb Balance Whole Wheat](#); [Mission Gluten-Free Spinach and Herb](#); [Mission Cauliflower Wraps](#)

WRAPS WITH A THEME

This website (www.EasyWrapRecipes.com) has **great pictures** and **easy recipes** to follow.

Not all are low-carb but the recipes are written in a way that you can easily swap ingredients, as needed. Wrap recipes are here but so are salads, meal prep ideas, 15-minute recipes, and more. Great website! Lots of videos included too!

- ❖ Click on this link to go straight to the [Recipe Index](#)
- ❖ Click on this link to see [25 easy low-carb wrap recipes](#) (links below)



To help you access the recipes quickly, here are direct links:

Keto Turkey Bacon Ranch	Keto Buffalo Chicken Lettuce Wrap	Thai Chicken Collard Wraps	Sesame Chicken Lettuce Wraps	Easy Chopped Thai Chicken Salad
BLT Lettuce Wraps	BLT Egg Wraps	Ham and Swiss Lettuce Wrap	Turkey Keto Club	Keto Chicken Bacon Ranch Lettuce Wrap
Italian Lettuce Wrap	Keto Chicken Fajita Lettuce Wrap	Keto Club Lettuce Wrap	Keto Chicken Broccoli Cheddar Hot Pocket	Keto Chicken Barbeque Taquitos
Keto Oven Baked Taquitos	Easy Keto Steak Wraps	Keto Pigs in a Blanket	Keto Jalapeño Popper Taquitos with Bacon	Roasted Garlic Ranch Eggplant Rolls
Keto Chicken Bacon Ranch Taquitos	Keto Pizza Rolls	Easy Keto Enchiladas	Buffalo Chicken Taquitos	Grilled Zucchini Mozzarella Wraps

To further inspire you, here are pics of a few recipes listed above:



A few notes:






- **Sauces/Condiments:** Remember to get mayo without soybean oil. Same goes for any dressings or sauces used. For the “Ranch seasoning mix” you could make your own [Ranch dressing](#).
- Some of these recipes would be great just on top of a **bed of mixed greens** as opposed to a wrap.
- [Fat Head Dough](#) is used in some recipes to make a crust. It’s not that tricky to make, and has many uses in lower carb cooking. You will need some almond or coconut flour. Give it a try!!
- Cheddar cheese can make the “shell” or “[wrap](#)” for some items, particularly tacos or taquitos.
- Keto “**Pigs in a Blanket**”: Try using different flavors of **chicken sausage** too!
- Some of these could be an easy **dinner** as opposed to lunch; experiment and see what fits your life!

SALADS






Salads can be a good lunch choice for many reasons. They are easy to prepare ahead of time for one thing. They are very transportable too. Salads help you get some veggies into your day all in one fell swoop. And as long as you include some quality **protein**, it can make a balanced and satisfying meal. It's also important to include some healthy fats; but make sure the salad dressing isn't full of inflammatory fats (soybean oil and others named in "**Healthy and Unhealthy Fats**" handout).

Check the "**Salads**" PDF to find options other than what is showcased here. Examples below will fit nicely into a "**portable lunch**" strategy; some of the ones found on the other handout may be more suitable for a dinner meal or a situation where you can prepare and eat it immediately. Feel free to swap out the protein source (chicken vs tuna vs salmon, etc) - but avoid having tuna more than a couple times per week; the [mercury level](#) is too high for more than that. Several of these options below could also be placed in a wrap. Suit yourself!

PORTABLE SALADS: VERY LOW CARB

				
<u>Easy and Healthy Tuna Salad</u>	<u>Easy Keto Chicken Salad</u>	<u>Keto Whole 30 Chicken Salad Bowl</u>	<u>Creamy Chicken Salad w/Cilantro Ranch Dressing</u>	<u>Mediterranean Chicken Salad</u>

PORTABLE SALADS: MODERATE CARB

				
<u>White Bean Salad with Bacon</u>	<u>Cold Lentil Salad with Cucumbers and Olives</u>	<u>The Best Easy Taco Salad</u>	<u>Tomato Chickpea Salad</u>	<u>Chickpea Waldorf Salad</u>
Increase cheese amount for more protein; honey is optional in the dressing.	To increase the protein, add ¼ to ½ cup cottage cheese. Julie's favorite: <u>Good Culture</u> .	Calories are a bit high but fine for a 2-meal-per-day strategy; or modify ingredients.	Make in bulk; add rotisserie chicken and/or feta to increase protein amount.	Add chicken to increase protein amount; recipe includes a creamy yogurt dressing.

FAST FOOD AND RESTAURANT SALADS: Are they ok?

You can find a variety of salad options at any restaurant. Pick one that suits your taste buds. And there are some strategies you can use to optimize your salad, if you are willing to do so. Restaurants are used to accommodating people with food allergies and other health issues, so speak up!

Ways to optimize your salad:

- ❖ Get **grilled** chicken rather than **breaded and fried** options; same goes for other protein items.
- ❖ Ask if it comes with **fried onions**, **wontons** or any other little **fried tidbits**; these add up quickly!
- ❖ It's ok to have a little **fresh fruit** on your salad - but avoid salads that are **MOSTLY** fruit (too many carbs, not enough protein)- and **leave off any dried fruit** options (concentrated sugar source).
- ❖ Watch out for **candied/flavored nuts/seeds**. These are sugar bombs!
- ❖ Commercial salad dressings are made from **soybean and other unfavorable oils**. It doesn't matter if it's a "vinaigrette" or something creamier, soybean oil is the main one used in the food industry. Ask what the dressing is made from. Bring your own if you can, or learn to use the **LEAST** amount possible. Or take your salad home or to work where you have a better salad dressing stashed.

PROTEIN SHAKES

IS IT A SNACK OR A MEAL?

A protein shake may sound like a good idea - and it *could* be a good plan - but **ONLY** if it actually **satisfies you as a meal**, providing energy for *at least* 3 hours. Choose one with plenty of protein, that isn't a "sugar bomb" and that has quality ingredients. The handout "**Protein Shakes and Smoothies**" can help you find higher quality shake options that meet these criteria.

PREMADE SHAKES

Premade shakes are available, but most of them have **sucralose** in them, which is unfavorable for our gut bacteria and may also increase insulin levels. The best option will usually be a **protein powder** that you add to unsweetened almond, coconut or cashew milk. You will get the best result by using a blender. Add ice and/or other acceptable add-ins.

MAKE IT LAST!

To make your shake last longer, try blending a healthy fat source into it, like a quarter to half an avocado (makes it seem richer and creamier and can also take away the "chalky" taste) or a scoop of PB2 or a tablespoon of nut butter. You could also try combining it with a side salad or veggies with acceptable Ranch dip or other items from the "**Mix and Match**" section of this handout.

LEFTOVERS

This can be a GREAT option! Taking leftovers for lunch is easy AND prevents food waste!

- ❖ You might intentionally cook more food than you need for a dinner meal so you can take leftovers for lunch.
- ❖ You may also intentionally *bake* a casserole or other similar item that you portion out into individual containers to take for lunch. If this strategy appeals to you, see the "**Meal Prep**" handout for more ideas.
- ❖ It's helpful to have glass storage containers that can be safely microwaved (avoid microwaving plastic). Glass containers go from freezer to microwave really well and they are durable. To take the meal with you, simply remove the plastic lid, cover with plastic wrap, and replace the

lid; then when you are ready to microwave it, remove the plastic lid, only microwaving the glass container with the wrap on top. More info about this on the “Meal Prep” handout.

- ❖ Be sure to include plenty of protein, a moderate amount of fat, and limit the carbs.

Sidenote from Julie:

Some items don't taste as good when reheated. For example, if I have leftover chicken to add to a salad, I don't reheat the chicken. Same for steak or salmon. I just let the protein portion sit at room temperature for 30-60 minutes before adding to my salad.

MEAL PREP

This strategy is helpful for those who like to **plan out meals in advance** - or for those who want to learn this skill!. The idea is to go ahead a prep several days (up to 5 days) all at one time. Many times this will involve a meal that is repeated over and over or it could be a couple of versions of a meal.

See separate PDF titled “Meal Prep” to view recipes that work well with this strategy.

FROZEN MEALS

It doesn't hurt to keep a few meals stashed in the freezer; in a pinch, this could be the best option. These meals might be **ones that you buy premade**, or you may even have some tucked away from **meals you made in the past and intentionally froze for later**.

HOMEMADE VERSIONS

If you know in advance that you will be taking this with you the next day, you might want to pull the meal from the freezer the night before, and let it begin to thaw in the fridge; then just add it to your lunch bag the next day.

Examples of homemade soups and casseroles that freeze well:

- Mushroom Burger Scramble (from “Recipes_Set #1)
- Tuna Casserole (from “Recipes_Set #1)
- Just about any soup!

PREMADE/COMMERCIAL FROZEN MEALS

It will be important to **read ingredient lists** to find ones that are higher quality. Also be sure to find ones with plenty of protein but not too many carbs (depends on your daily carb budget as to what will work for you). Look for ones somewhat lower in sodium too.

If you have one in mind that you like, please take a picture of the front and the back and text it to me. I can help you look at it more closely to see how it fits into your plan.

MIX AND MATCH

This option is great for those who don't like to spend much time prepping their lunch. It is also good for those days where you simply didn't have time to get anything else together. Maybe you have some leftover chicken or some veggies in the fridge to use up - or you may intentionally keep some of these items stocked so you can use this strategy routinely. The trick is to **make this feel like a MEAL** and not a SNACK. Pick a protein option, add a source of healthy fats and perhaps something with some "crunch". You could add these to a wrap too! Items you may like to mix and match are listed below.

PROTEIN	HEALTHY FAT	SAVORY/CRUNCH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boiled or deviled eggs • Packet of chicken or tuna • Rotisserie chicken • Deli meat • Leftover chicken, beef, burger, pork chop, etc. • Canadian bacon • Shrimp • Smoked salmon or trout • Pimento cheese • Cottage cheese • Greek yogurt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avocado or guacamole • Salad dressing or dip (<i>made from avocado or olive oil</i>) • Cheese • Nuts • Nut butter • Olives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raw veggies like celery, cucumber, cherry tomatoes, carrots, bell pepper strips, broccoli, cauliflower • Side salad or slaw • Crackers (made with reasonable ingredients) • Pumpkin seeds or nuts (these provide protein and fat too) • Kimchi or sauerkraut • Pickles, olives, pickled veggies

What about fruit?

Fruit is a whole, real food. It is a source of fiber and many valuable nutrients. However, it is also a source of sugar/carbs. Depending on your daily carb allowance, you may be able to include a serving of fruit with your lunch (or as a healthy snack between lunch and dinner). A medium apple is in the 20 gram carb range. A cup of strawberries has 12 grams carbs (9 grams net carbs). Refer to the handout "Fruit" for a table that lists the carb and fiber content of individual fruit. It's best to view fruit as a sweet/dessert type of item that can accent your diet, but it's not the main event at a meal.