***Patrick:***

School is back in South Australia and into New South Wales. Kids will be heading back in the coming week or so. And last week, Belinda Smith joined the program from the root cause to look at the school lunchboxes and the concept of maybe visiting them before necessarily going back to school. And this week we revisit the sandwich.

Good morning, Belinda.

***Belinda:***

Good morning, Patrick.

***Patrick:***

It is a busy time period, the return to school in SA it's, uh, it can be a bit of a, a bit of a change to the system and to the routines.

***Belinda:***

It most certainly can. It's a big change for everybody. I think that's something for us parents and caregivers to, to recognize that it's, whilst it's about the kids, there's also a shift in gear for us. And it brings us our own challenges that we're trying to juggle the balls of getting kids that perhaps are excited or not excited about going back to school. But at the same time, also trying to work out what do we pack in those lunchboxes.

***Patrick:***

And one of the key items for many a lunchbox from now until the end of time and into the past is a sandwich.

***Belinda:***

Oh, 100%. I mean, we've been collecting data with our schools that we partner with for, since 2019. So we know that the average Australian lunchbox has, about 70% of them still contain sandwiches, which are, can be fantastic. And they, they can be quick and there's absolutely not anything wrong with them at all. But I thought that today we could look at the difference between sandwiches and how we can use them to, I guess boost our children's ability to focus, behave, and and learn at school, but also make our job easy as well.

***Patrick:***

Okay. So where does one start when talking about a sandwich and benefiting their children?

***Belinda:***

Well, I think if we think of a sandwich and break it down into three core components that makes a big difference.

So there's the bread and then there's the kind of spread that we put on the bread, and then there's the filling.

So if we walk through each of those pieces, we can talk about, I guess boosting nutrition. This is always my focus.

What are the little things that we can do to boost nutrition that will help our children? And it also a bit of a stepping stone. We can't expect, our kids aren't light switches. If they're used to like a Vegemite sandwich on white bread, we can't expect them to go to like a sour, a rye sourdough you know, pumped up salad sandwich overnight. We need to kind of make our way there.

But if we look at bread, um, I guess the thing that we need to recognize is that the quality of the bread can determine how long our children get energy from it. So bread is a carbohydrate, which is an energy source, but the more processed and refined the bread. So the whiter the bread is, the quicker our kids will get a bit of a glucose spike, a little short energy spike from it, but they'll drop down quicker so they don't get as longer lasting energy from it.

***Patrick:***

Okay.

***Belinda:***

So if we want to try to give them as much energy for focus and learning as possible, then making a swap from white bread to like a whole grain bread and moving towards, if your budget can stretch that far,

moving towards like something like a sourdough where the starter has been fermented and we know that that's actually a little bit better for our children's gut health.

So, you know, what can we do to transition over the year? It doesn't have to be overnight, but now knowing that white bread gives them the least kind of benefit for learning and also their health, what little things could we do to move?

So something I did recently with one of my partner corporations was we ran a lunchbox edition mad food science event and we got the children up the front and we spoke about the different bread and we looked at, you know what could we do if we like white bread? How can we, you know, slowly start to change? So, you know, one piece of white bread with a piece of whole grain.

***Patrick:***

Mm-Hmm, yeah. Idea.

***Belinda:***

So, you know, Do both idea. Yeah. And if your children are really stuck on the white bread, please don't stress, because the next thing that we can do is how do we actually boost the inside of the sandwich?

So it's still keeping the white bread, but what can we do to boost the inside?

So that then takes us into looking at the spread and the filling of the sandwich.

***Patrick:***

Yes. So with, with the spreads, and it might be a scary word to say, but a nourishing fat the, the fat might hit the ear wrong and people you may go, oh geez, a fat, that doesn't sound too good, but what's it, what's a nourishing fat? Is it good?

***Belinda:***

Well, this is a great question Patrick, because for many, many years there was science that said fats were contributing to cardiovascular disease and high cholesterol. And what the latest research is actually showing is that's not actually the case. If it's a nourishing fat, which is something that supports our health, you know, they keep our, you know, stomach fuller for longer. Like it really aids with digesting the food and keeping it fuller in the stomach. So we get longer lasting energy also supports our brain health.

So those kinds of fats are things like good quality butter, mayonnaise, avocado, hummus. You know, are made with a good quality, you know, extra virgin olive oil.

Now I should actually qualify this, that this is what the latest science is actually showing, like the latest scientific research, our Australian dietary guidelines haven't caught up with that yet, but they are currently under review. So if people want to, you know, look for the research around that, there's a fantastic science and nutrition podcast that is available where there's a lot of, you know, scientific professors talking about these kinds of things. It's a UK based podcast, but it's fascinating and very, very, very knowledgeable quoting the studies. And that's called ZOE Science and Nutrition. (https://zoe.com/learn/category/podcasts)

What I love about it is that it's actually professors and scientists sharing the research, but in kind of plain language That people like you.

***Patrick:***

Yeah. Conversational. Yeah.

***Belinda:***

Yeah, definitely. So if we go back to our sandwich, even switching up, if you're able to get your children to have maybe a little bit of mayo, like a whole egg mayonnaise or an avocado and I'm not saying layer it on thick, just a thin spread of that on there it will help is the nutrition.

And then the third thing is of course, what we put in the middle of the sandwich.

So we know from the data that we've been collecting that over half of the sandwiches contain just a simple spread like Vegemite jam or honey.

So keeping in mind that question of what can I do to boost nutrition as the sandwich. It's kind of like, what can I add to it that can help?

So I posed this question to the children that I had at this workshop. We were looking specifically at the white bread Vegemite sandwich what could we do to make that sandwich better? And the children come up with things like adding on some cheese. So cheese is great from the perspective that it's a protein and it's also combined with good quality fat in the, in the cheese.

So protein's important because it plays a role in our growth and development and it will also help keep tummies fuller for longer. So what we're aiming for is a sandwich that keeps them fuller for longer, and therefore we don't need to pack as many packet snacks, which, you know, can add up as well.

***Patrick:***

I'm speaking with Belinda Smith from The Root Cause and we are discussing a lunchbox trait of many lunchbox, the sandwich. And Belinda, we've talked through a bit about the three core components from the bread to the spread that wasn't meant to rhyme, but it did and the protein and filling.

But when it comes to inaction, the sandwich has been made. The kid takes it to, uh, the child, your child takes it to school, even if you've thrown in the idea of one piece of white and one piece of whole grain just to ease them into a different change. But what happens if like the kid comes home from school, you look at the lunchbox and the sandwich hasn't been eaten, how does one approach that discussion of work-shopping it with their child to get something that they will want to eat?

***Belinda:***

That's a fantastic question. Patrick, and I love the, the fact that you've used work shopping. So one of the things I would love to encourage parents and caregivers to think about right now is that when our kids go back to school, the first two or three week weeks is a settling in period. And we need to be cognizant of that. For some children, they may not have seen their friends for weeks. For some of them they may have anxiety about going back to school.

There's new teachers, there's new classes. So what goes on in the first three weeks isn't always going to be indicative of the rest of the school year. So just remember that. To recognize that the lunchbox coming home with food, food store in it isn't saying that there's something wrong with the food that's in it. It's just actually like a little bit of a red flag to say, okay there's something more that's going on here because we know that they would normally eat these things at home.

So what's going on to causing it? So the work-shopping word, the reason why I highlighted you using that is

because what we are best avoiding is kind of having conversations that are activator and angry and frustrated with them because food that we've packed come home and we think it's wasted. Yeah. We wanna have gentle conversations, you know, around, Hey, I noticed that your sandwiches come home. Is everything all right? You know, what's, what's happening at school? And you will, when you have these conversations, you might find out that for right now handball or basketball is more important for your kids, or they're embarrassed to eat in front of their friends. Like you might find out a wide range of things.

So for me I can share personal stories that people might want to think about for themselves. But my son started year seven last year and he very much is a bit of a basketball nut. And he said to me at one point, mom, like, basketball's more important than eating my lunch. And so we spoke about, okay, well understand that basketball is very important, but so you're learning and you need things for, for your brain. What can we do? Like what's simple. That you could eat at school? And then what can we do to make sure that you have a really great breakfast so

that it keeps you going until you get home from school?

So just those conversations.

Another one that is probably, um, you know, big on people who have children with braces. I discovered, like with my daughter when she had braces, she got them in year eight, for quite a period of time she becomes very conscious of the food that she ate and it getting stuck in her braces.

***Patrick:***

It's a problem.

***Belinda:***

And you just never know until you start asking questions.

And so having or workshopping, you know, just open-ended questions

to try to work out what's going on and asking them, you know, well, what can we do for the next week or two as you settle in even if you've got children who haven't gone back to school, yet you could say to them, what would you like in your lunchbox on that first day?

You know, give them options. So, you know, my son doesn't start back until Friday and we've sat down 'cause he's got braces after school finished.

And I, I said to him what things do you want in your lunchbox this year? And we looked at all the things that he used to eat, we isolated them down to the things that he felt he would be comfortable eating in front of people with braces. And then I said, okay, well based on the fact that you've chosen sushi, rice paper rolls, and a simple sandwich, which one of those do you want for your first day back at school?

Yeah, cool. And yeah, just gets their buy-in.

So I guess the real important message for all of our parents out there is just be super conscious that the first three weeks back in is a real settle in period. And we don't need to pack lots of food. This is a big thing. We are used to our kids being in the pantry, in the fridge all the time during the school holidays, but when they're back at school, life is busy. They only get 15 minutes to eat and they're in amongst their friends and they haven't socialized for a long time. So they probably will not need lots of food. And if we pack lots of food, particularly packet foods know that they will more than likely gravitate to that packet food rather than say the sandwich or the piece of fruit you want them to eat.

***Patrick:***

Very well, Belinda, thank you for joining the program as always. Look forward to hearing what other advice, tips you have next week.

***Belinda:***

Alright. Good luck everyone. Remember you're doing an amazing job.

***Patrick:***

Fantastic. Thank you Belinda Smith from the Root Cause there.

Yes, we are all doing a great job. It is a busy period, kids back to school.