



# The Smart Sandwich

Three delicious strategies for packing an inspiring and healthful lunch. BY ELLIE KRIEGER

WHEN MY DAUGHTER WAS A TODDLER, I wouldn't dream of leaving the house without a selection of healthful snacks. Of course, I'd pack nothing for myself and wind up begging to share her bag of Cheerios, but eventually I wised up and began to include a little something for me, too. Now that my daughter is in grade school and the portable food focus is on lunch, I haven't forgotten that valuable lesson. When I pack her lunch box, I pack one for myself as well. I'm amazed at how much return there is on this small investment of effort.

When I have lunch with me, I eat healthier portions of better-quality food. Plus, it's ready to eat, and I save money. Nutritional studies back up the bring-it-with-you benefits: When we eat out or order in, we end up consuming more of the stuff we don't need, like calories, fat, and sodium, and less of what we do need, like nutrients and fiber. Preparing your own food means you eat more healthfully without even thinking about it.

If you do think about it, even better. That's why lately I've been pondering sandwiches—the quintessential lunch box item—and what makes one that's both tasty and optimally healthy. The result: three smart sandwich strategies and one fabulous Greek salad pita recipe (opposite) that pulls them all together.

## STRATEGY #1

### Choose the right bread

Years ago, a sandwich usually included two modest slices of bread. Now, many rolls, bagels, and wraps are so oversized that they weigh as much as four standard bread slices. To keep carb portions smart, aim for 2 ounces of bread (56 grams; the nutrition label gives you the weight of a serving) and make it whole grain for its fiber, antioxidants, and nutty taste. This generally translates to two slices of sandwich bread, a 6-inch pita, or a 9-inch wrap (pitas and wraps are great for stuffing with vegetables; see strategy #3). Scooping out the center of a crusty baguette or roll is another way to cut down on bread and fit more healthy fillings in your sandwich.

## STRATEGY #2

### Spread the wealth

Get yourself out of a mayo rut by exploring condiments that are both flavorful and healthful. Try slathering on an herb or sun-dried tomato pesto, a spread of buttery-ripe mashed avocado, or some rich, creamy hummus.

(Not only are these delicious, but you also get the benefits of their monounsaturated fats and vital nutrients.) The olive-garlic tapenade for the sandwich opposite also works wonders in a simple turkey or tuna salad sandwich. Or try mixing two parts Dijon mustard with one part honey for a sweet-tangy low-calorie spread.

## STRATEGY #3

### Amp up the vegetables

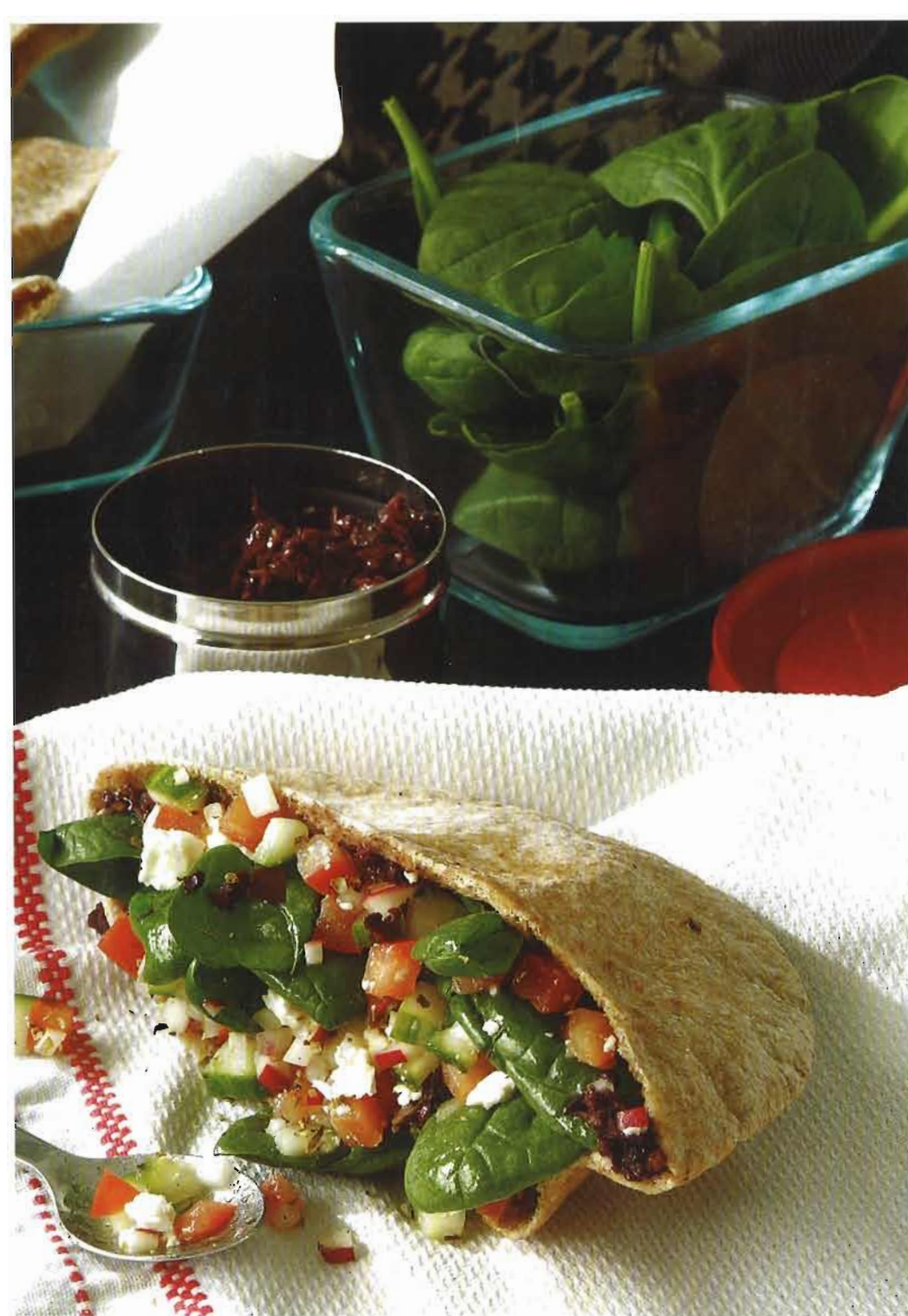
That go-to lettuce leaf and slice of tomato is fine, but you can do so much better. Try grilled vegetables (like zucchini, eggplant, fennel, peppers, onions, and tomatoes), interesting greens (watercress, arugula, and frisée), or even veggies you might not think of for a sandwich (steamed asparagus and green beans; sliced radishes, red onion, and cooked beets; shredded carrot and cabbage; raw snow peas). Toss them with a touch of fruity olive oil, lemon juice or good-quality vinegar, some fresh herbs, and a little salt and pepper, and you can take these vegetables from good to great.

With these three strategies—choosing the right bread, a better spread, and lots of veggies—you'll build tastier, healthier sandwiches. After all, just because you're out of grade school doesn't mean you don't need a good lunch. In fact, when my daughter gets her spiffy new lunch box this month, I may just pick up one for myself.



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## greek salad pitas with olive-garlic tapenade

If you're packing these sandwiches to go, put the salad mixture in a container and add it to the pitas just before eating so they don't get soggy.

**Yields 4 sandwiches**

### FOR THE TAPENADE

- 1 medium clove garlic
- ½ cup pitted Kalamata olives
- 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1½ tsp. red wine vinegar

### FOR THE SANDWICH

- 1½ cups seeded and finely diced English cucumber (about ½ medium)
- 1¼ cups seeded and finely diced Roma tomatoes (about 3 medium)
- ¾ cup crumbled feta
- ½ cup finely diced radishes (about 4 medium)
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 Tbs. red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 4 medium (6- to 7-inch) whole-wheat pitas, warmed
- 4 cups lightly packed baby spinach leaves

### MAKE THE TAPENADE

Put the garlic in a food processor and process until chopped. Add the olives, olive oil, and vinegar and process until spreadable but not completely smooth.

### ASSEMBLE THE SANDWICH

In a large bowl, combine the cucumber, tomatoes, feta, and radishes. Add the olive oil, vinegar, oregano, and a few grinds of pepper and toss to combine.

**Slice the pitas** in half and open the pockets. Divide the tapenade among the pitas, spreading it evenly inside each. Stuff each pita half with about ½ cup of the spinach and ½ cup of the salad mixture and serve.

*Registered dietitian Ellie Krieger is a Fine Cooking contributing editor.*

## Good to Know

Five sandwiches put the three strategies at left to work:

**Italian** Spread a scooped-out baguette with sun-dried tomato pesto; layer on sliced tomato, grilled eggplant, arugula, and fresh mozzarella.

**Californian** Spread mashed avocado in a pita; add sliced roasted turkey breast, sliced radishes, shredded carrot, and butter lettuce.

**German** Spread honey mustard on a wrap; add sliced ham, beets, watercress, and cornichons.

**Niçoise** Spread olive tapenade (see the recipe at right) on a scooped-out baguette; add tuna salad made with lemon juice and olive oil, and layer on sliced hard-cooked egg, tomatoes, red onion, and green beans.

**Mediterranean** Spread hummus in a pita; add grilled zucchini, peppers, fennel, and onions; finish with a sprinkle of pine nuts.