



What I Buy and Why: Lunch Meat

Ingredients to Avoid

The #1 ingredient you don't want to see in the ingredients list is [sodium nitrite](#). Other unwanted ingredients may include added sugars (i.e. honey, dextrose) and food preservatives (like [Sodium Phosphate](#), Sodium Diacetate, Sodium Erythorbate), and ["Natural" Flavors](#). Although these are considered ["Generally Recognized As Safe" \(GRAS\)](#) by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), many also appear on the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) [Dirty Dozen Guide to Food Additives](#).

Nutrition Criteria to Consider

Based on criteria from the American Heart Association, aim for the following:

Total Fat	Less than 5 grams (per 100 grams)
Saturated Fat	Less than 2 grams (per 100 grams)
Trans Fat	Less than 0.5 grams (per label serving)
Cholesterol	Less than 95 mg (per 100 grams)
Sodium	480 mg or less (per label serving)

Other Considerations

Cost: At easily \$7.00 per pound, there is good reason to cut back on sandwich meat for your food budget alone. Buying the whole cut of meat and self-slicing is a smart, cost-effective solution..

Convenience: There is something to be said for having sandwich meat ready to go when Monday morning rolls around. Consider meal planning and even minimal food prep to slice your own meat, whip up an easy chicken salad, or try out a new meatless Monday sandwich option instead.

Perishability: Consider how quickly you will be eating the lunch meat. Fresh (or opened) processed lunch meat is highly perishable and must be eaten quickly. Consider other options (like canned tuna/chicken or smoked salmon) if purchasing in advance or purchase lunch meat in sealed packs.

Recommended Options

To shop smarter, consider any of the following items. No one has a perfect diet all the time, but it is important to weigh your options and to make conscious buying decisions as the nutritional gatekeeper of your household. Over time, each small choice adds up to a healthier lifestyle for you and your family.

Good	Better	Best
Buy "all-natural" deli meat without added nitrites	Slice your own turkey breast, shred meat for chicken salad, or shave meat from rump roast	Forgo processed meats altogether
Store-brand all-natural options (like Open Nature at Safeway/Randall's), or organic offerings like Applegate	Organic poultry or grass-fed beef	Alternate good-quality tuna and salmon with cheese, eggs, and other plant-based options (like avocado, hummus, and nut butters)

For More Info

To evaluate how your lunch meat compares, use the [EWG Food Scores](#) tool where several lunch meats are analyzed using their rigorous criteria for health and safety.