

The World's (Almost) Happiest People Are Eating This For Lunch Day in, day out.

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You might wonder: Why? Why eat this, every single day?

The Norwegian tradition for this meal, called packed lunch goes way back. A slice or two of whole wheat bread, with cheese, jam, or liver paste topping it.

Traditions

This lunch actually originates from a breakfast initiative named The Oslo Breakfast, which started in the early 1930s. At this time, Norway was not a wealthy country, and there was a lot of poverty in the country and its capital. The Oslo Breakfast was a program run by the government that provided a free meal to school children.

Most of the time the ingredients included the following:
Two slices of whole wheat bread spread with margarine

- A slice of cheese
- Half a pint of milk
- Half an apple and half an orange

Nothing more, nothing less. Same food, day in, day out. Kids were grateful for the meal provided to them.

Health benefits

This plain and simplistic meal turned out to have some health benefits. The improvement of school children's physical health was thoroughly documented during the time the breakfast was served. They performed better in school and were overall healthier and happier than before.

Over time, The Oslo Breakfast was introduced in several places outside Oslo, and it attracted attention outside the country's borders. Only interrupted by the state of emergency during World War II, the breakfast program continued until the beginning of the 1960s.

When the initiative was phased out, parents started packing the same food for their kids, and the kids would eat it for lunch at school. The meal was named matpakke.

Convenient

Over time, adults also implemented this simple meal. It was easy to prepare, it was cheaper than almost any other option out there, and also very convenient.

How many times have you debated and thought about what to get for lunch, whether you eat out, or prepare it yourself? Not to mention how much to spend on lunch?

It is extremely convenient knowing every day what you are going to eat for lunch, and knowing that it's not going to rob your wallet. Over time, the food might get boring too, though. Your biggest excitement is that maybe the hole in the Jarlsberg cheese looks a little bit different today.

As a Norwegian, I used to eat this lunch throughout my childhood, college, and well into my working life. Two pieces of bread, topped with cheese. Sometimes I would add cucumbers or peppers on top of the cheese. To drink, I would go with water.

This simple lunch is much healthier than ordering a pizza or fast food, and Norwegians, in general, are prioritizing a healthy lifestyle. Norway is the ninth healthiest nation in the world, according to Bloomberg's 2019 Healthiest Country Index. The Nordic diet is known for promoting whole grains, fish, fruit, vegetables, and berries, and for avoiding all things sugary and processed.

So, maybe this simple lunch is boring, but it keeps you in shape, and you don't have to worry about what to make for lunch and how much it's going to cost you.

Content

If there is anything Norwegians are known for, it is how content they are with life. The Nordic countries, Norway included, have been on the top list of the world's happiest countries for a long time. From 2013 until today, every time the World Happiness Report has published its annual ranking of countries, the five Nordic countries Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland, have all been in the top ten.

I am not going to say that the lunch the Norwegians eat is the main reason for their happiness, but by making everyday life a little bit simpler by not worrying about what to make or buy for lunch and instead being content with what you have, maybe by doing so, life gets a little bit easier, one bite at a time.