

MYPLATE FOR BETTER HEALTH

Nutrition News You Can Use



Learn how to improve your health with MyPlate and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Every five years an expert committee of doctors, scientists and nutrition experts is convened by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). This committee reviews and analyzes the most current scientific information on diet and health. They then publish an updated *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. These guidelines provide information and advice that can help the public make informed food choices. They encourage all of us to eat nutrient dense foods and to achieve ‘calorie balance’ for a healthy weight. To help Americans more easily understand and adopt the new dietary guidelines, the USDA has replaced the longstanding food pyramid with a new healthy food symbol called ‘MyPlate’.

A plate is chosen to guide healthy eating

MyPlate is a picture of how most of us should try to eat for better health. The change from pyramid to plate was made after consumer research showed that a picture of a healthy plate filled with the right balance of healthy foods was the clearest way to communicate the new Dietary Guidelines. If your plate looks like the MyPlate, then you’re taking steps to better health — it’s as simple as that.

The main message of MyPlate

The public is constantly receiving nutrition messages from a variety of sources, many of which have no scientific basis. MyPlate communicates healthy eating messages that are based on proven science, extensive research, years of study and a consensus of America’s leading health experts.

MyPlate encourages you to:

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Make at least half your grains whole grains.
- Vary your protein choices.
- Switch to skim or 1% milk.

MyPlate and foods to eat more often

Studies show that most Americans do not eat recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low fat dairy. MyPlate guides Americans of all ages to choose more from these healthy food groups because they provide important nutrients without excessive calories or saturated fats. A tremendous amount of research has shown that if Americans follow these guidelines they will improve their health, reduce their incidence of nutrition related diseases, have healthier weights and lower healthcare costs.

Make half your plate fruits and vegetables:

The first thing most people notice about MyPlate is that so much of the plate is filled with fruits and vegetables. Years of studies have shown that eating more fruits and vegetables is important for better health. So the MyPlate communicates a simple goal to all Americans — try to fill half your plate with them; and even more vegetables than fruits. Whether fruits and vegetables are fresh for the season, frozen from the freezer aisle, canned or dried, they should be the foundation of your healthy plate.

Make half your grains whole grains:

The second thing many notice about MyPlate is that there are more grains than protein, and that the grain section is brown. This is intended to encourage us to eat more whole grains. More and more evidence is showing that whole grains in the diet are important for better health. Making at least half your grains whole grains is advised since whole grains contain significantly more fiber and other nutrients than refined grains. To see if your grains are whole grains, check labels to make sure that the first ingredient on the list is whole grain. For example, look for “whole wheat”, “oatmeal”, “brown rice”, “whole grain



Our dietitians receive hundreds of questions each year about a wide variety of nutrition topics. Their timely and trustworthy insights and ideas can help you and your family live healthier lives.



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cornmeal”, and “bulgur”.

Vary Your Protein Choices:

The third item of note is that the protein section of the plate is much smaller than many people are used to. Traditional American meals often include large portions of meat. Since we also get protein from other food groups like grains and dairy, most Americans end up getting twice the amount of protein needed for good health. The protein food group includes animal sources like meat, poultry, seafood and eggs as well as plant sources like beans, peas, soy products, nuts and seeds. When you choose from the protein group, think size and most of all variety. Since many of our meat choices tend to contain unhealthy saturated fats, keep meat portions small and lean, make seafood the protein on your plate twice a week and eat plant based proteins like beans, soy and nuts more often.

Switch to skim or 1% milk:

Dairy is also a part of the MyPlate place setting. This food group is recommended because of calcium it provides. Fat free or low fat versions of milk, yogurt, cheeses and other dairy products are recommended since they are a good source of calcium but have less unhealthy saturated fat and calories. Soy based calcium fortified beverages and dark green vegetables like kale, collard greens and broccoli are good alternate sources of calcium.

MyPlate and foods to eat less often

Many Americans eat more than their fair share of foods like cakes, cookies, ice cream, processed lunch meats & cheeses and salty snacks. One of the goals of the new MyPlate is to encourage all of us to eat fewer of these types of foods. The reason is that they can be high in added sugars, sodium (salt), saturated fat, or other highly processed/refined ingredients. The ChooseMyPlate.gov web site offers additional suggestions from the experts, including guidance on which foods we should eat less frequently. Here are a few of these suggestions:

Choose foods with little or no added sugar:

Americans consume an average of almost 150 pounds of sugars a year in the foods we eat and beverages we drink. All this sugar is contributing to our weight problems and health issues. So MyPlate encourages us to eat sugary foods less often and to avoid sweetened beverages.

Look out for sodium in the foods you buy:

The dietary guidelines recommend no more than 1,500 to 2,300 milligrams of sodium a day for good health. This can be a challenge since sodium is found in our everyday foods, many of which don't even taste salty. Since sodium can 'hide' in so many places, get in the habit of looking at labels. This advice is recommended for all foods — from breads to condiments, snacks to salad dressings, frozen meals to canned soups — check the sodium before you buy!

Eat fewer foods high in saturated fats:

Too much saturated fat in our diets is contributing to high rates of heart disease and some types of cancers. MyPlate encourages us to consume less of this kind of fat. Some examples of foods that can be high in saturated fats include high fat cuts of meat, processed or cured meats like sausages and cold cuts, full fat dairy products like cheese or ice cream, and baked desserts like cookies, pastries and cakes. These foods are O.K. to include in a healthy diet, but in smaller quantities and less frequently.

MyPlate Makes Healthy Eating Easier

Following MyPlate is a great way to eat healthier. But the MyPlate symbol is only the beginning. The website ChooseMyPlate.gov provides much more useful information. There are details about nutritional benefits by food group and guidance for how much of each type of food is recommended. Also, visitors to the website can use the MyPlate *SuperTracker* to calculate their daily calorie needs. The SuperTracker even helps you to track physical activity. Healthy eating does not have to be complicated or confusing. The simplicity of MyPlate makes it easy to follow the latest healthy eating guidelines.



Since everyone's health history and nutritional needs are so different, please make sure that you talk with your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that's right for you.