

Choose MyPlate: Enjoy Your Food But Eat Less¹

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In 2011, the USDA released a new symbol called MyPlate to promote healthier eating. It represents recommendations from the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. MyPlate reminds Americans to choose healthy foods they enjoy eating in portion sizes appropriate for them. Several key messages go along with MyPlate. These messages provide Americans with tips on how to make healthier food choices.

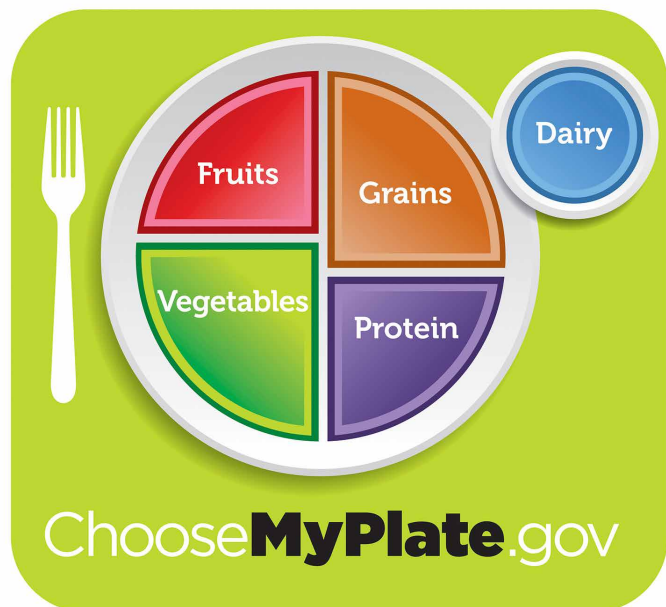


Figure 1. MyPlate offers a set of guidelines to help Americans choose healthy foods and eat appropriate portion sizes.

Credits: USDA

One of MyPlate's key messages is to *enjoy your food, but eat less* (USDA, 2011). Americans tend to select and consume larger portions than they need, and they don't always make the best choices either. Part of the secret to maintaining a healthy diet is to know which foods to select and how to balance your intake with the amount of energy your body uses. This publication provides information about which foods make the healthiest contributions to our diets and which to limit. It also provides tips for making it easier to adjust your portions and to enjoy foods while making adjustments to your plate.

Get to Know the Foods You Eat

The first step to a healthier diet is to know which foods are good for you and which foods you should limit. Knowing the foods to increase and the ones to limit helps you make good choices.

Foods to Increase

- **Fruits and vegetables** contain lots of fiber, vitamins, and minerals that our bodies need for good health. Filling half your plate with fruits and vegetables of different colors is a good way to ensure you get a good mix of the nutrients you need. And remember, fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables all count. When buying canned vegetables, the healthiest choices are "reduced sodium" or "no-salt-added." Canned fruits packed in water are better choices than those packed in syrup (USDA, 2011).

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- **Low-fat or fat-free milk** is an important part of a healthy diet. The recommended intake for children over nine years old and adults is three cups of low-fat or fat-free milk a day. All types of cow's milk contain calcium, a mineral needed for healthy bones, but it is better to choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products instead of whole-fat dairy products. Whole milk contains more fat than our bodies need, and eating too much fat can lead to weight gain and other health concerns. If you consume whole milk on a regular basis, switch gradually to reduced-fat (2%) milk, then to low-fat (1%) milk, and finally to fat-free milk (USDA, n.d., Dairy).
- **Whole grains** contain fiber, which is important for weight management, digestive health, and heart health. Make half your grains whole grains by choosing foods such as brown rice, whole-wheat bread, oatmeal, barley, and quinoa. To identify food items that contain whole grains, look for the Whole Grain logo (see Figure 2). Not all whole-grain foods carry this logo, so if you're not sure, check the ingredient list. Flour or grain listed as "enriched" or "refined" is not whole grain (USDA, n.d., Grains).



Figure 2. Look for the Whole Grain logo on foods to know it is a whole-grain product.

Credits: Whole Grains Council

Foods to Limit

- **Sodium** is found in many processed foods, and is commonly known as salt. Many Americans eat too much salt. Too much salt in the diet can lead to health problems

such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. You can reduce the amount of sodium in your diet by limiting the amount of salt you add to your foods and by choosing "reduced sodium," "no sodium added," or "low sodium" options when available (FDA, 2013).

- **Saturated fat** is found in animal products such as whole milk, cream, butter, high-fat cheeses, and high-fat cuts of meat. It can also be found in non-animal foods made with animal fat or highly-saturated vegetable fats. These foods include chocolate and common baked goods such as cakes and cookies. Vegetable oils high in saturated fat include palm oil, palm kernel oil, and coconut oil. It is important to limit this type of fat in your diet. Diets high in saturated fat have been linked to heart disease and other chronic diseases. To maintain a healthy diet, saturated fat should be limited to less than 10% of your daily intake (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, 2012).
- Foods high in **added sugars** also should be limited. Some foods, such as milk and fruits, naturally contain sugars. Added sugars are sugars and syrups added to prepared foods and drinks. Examples of added sugars are corn syrup and high-fructose corn syrup used in sweetened beverages and breakfast cereals. Added sugars should be limited because they provide empty calories. This means that they provide calories but few or no vitamins and minerals. Limiting the amount of added sugars in your diet is a good way to get the nutrients your body needs without eating too many calories. If you eat too many added sugars you may gain weight, and increased weight can lead to many health problems (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, 2012).

Control Your Portion Sizes

Why Is It Important to Control Your Portions?

Adjusting the size of portions you eat to what your body needs is one of the keys to good health. It helps you maintain a healthy weight and lowers your risk for chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

What Is a Healthy Portion Size for Me?

Everybody requires different portion sizes based on your age, sex, activity level, and health status. To learn more about the portion sizes best for you, use MyPlate's **SuperTracker** tool, found at <https://www.supertracker.usda.gov>. This tool also provides tips and support for making better food choices.

How Can I Control My Portions and Make Healthy Choices?

USE SMALLER PLATES

Using a smaller plate helps you limit the amount of food you serve yourself. Also, using a smaller plate is a good way to eat the foods you like without consuming more food than you need.

BE MINDFUL OF WHAT YOU ARE EATING AND ENJOY YOUR FOOD

Enjoying the taste, texture, and aroma of your meals is a good way to help you slow down and eat less. Paying attention to the amount of food you put on your plate and being mindful of how full you feel helps you avoid eating more food than you need.



Figure 3. Enjoying the food you are eating is a good way to help you slow down and eat less. If you full feel, stop eating and save your leftovers for later.

Credits: Wavebreak Media

INDULGE ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Limiting your intake of foods high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat, such as sugary desserts, salty snacks, high-fat meats, and butter is a smart move for your health. However, enjoying them every once in a while may be just the thing you need to stay motivated to follow a healthy eating plan.

EXPLORE HEALTHY WAYS TO SATISFY YOUR SWEET TOOTH

Eating fruit is a great way to satisfy your sweet tooth in a healthy, delicious way! There are many ways to use fruit as a sweet treat. You can eat fruit fresh, make it into smoothies, bake it with cinnamon (try apples or pears!), or make it into parfaits. Next time you get a craving for something sweet, make a healthy fruit recipe.



Figure 4. Fruit smoothies can satisfy your sweet tooth and help you get more fruits and low-fat milk or yogurt into your diet.

Credits: iStock

DRINK SMARTER

All calories count, even the ones you drink! Many people don't realize how many extra calories they get from drinking sodas or other sweetened drinks. These drinks provide empty calories and may lead to weight gain. Drinking water is a great way to satisfy your thirst. Other good beverage choices include fat-free or low-fat milk and 100% vegetable or fruit juices.

CHOOSE WISELY WHEN DINING OUT

Many restaurants offer healthier options on their menus. Choose the lighter options when you can—these items have lower calories, fat, sugar, and sodium. If there is no nutrition information on the menu, choose menu items that are grilled or roasted and select white meats. Avoid high-fat cuts of meat and foods that are fried or in a cream sauce or dressing. Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables by ordering vegetables as a side dish. Also, don't forget to take your time and enjoy your food! Listen to your hunger cues. If you are full, it is better to not finish your plate. You can take the leftovers home and enjoy them later.

Summary

Food is an amazing thing. It provides us with enjoyment as well as the energy and nutrients we need to stay active and healthy. In America, we tend to eat more calories than our bodies need. It is important to understand that we need to balance our intake of food with the energy we expend. Following the suggestions provided in this publication should help you enjoy your food, but eat less.

Learn More

To learn more about how to enjoy your food, but eat less, contact the UF/IFAS Extension Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) educator in your county (look in the blue pages of your telephone book). UF/IFAS Extension offices are listed online at <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map>.

MyPlate's Food-A-Pedia is a useful tool to find and compare nutrition information of more than 8,000 foods. Visit that site at <https://www.supertracker.usda.gov/foodapedia.aspx>.

Recommended Websites

USDA's MyPlate: This site contains information about MyPlate and all the food groups. You will also find the SuperTracker and Food-A-Pedia tools. <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010: This document contains evidence-based information and nutrition recommendations. <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/DietaryGuidelines/2010/PolicyDoc/PolicyDoc.pdf>

USDA's MyPlate 10 Tips Nutrition Education Series: Enjoy Your Food, But Eat Less. This document provides 10 tips on how to enjoy your food, but eat less. <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/TenTips/DGTipsheet18EnjoyYourFood.pdf>

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