

Dishing It Up

Look to 'the plate' to guide healthier eating

> There's a new food icon in town, and it doesn't wear a chef's hat or participate in high-profile television cooking competitions.

Enter the food plate, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's new symbol of healthy eating that replaces the old food pyramid. The new graphic is a familiar one: a dinner plate. It is divided into four nearly equal portions of fruit, vegetables, grains and proteins, with a serving of dairy on the side. The USDA's website, www.choosemyplate.gov, offers sample menus and encourages Americans to reduce portion size, add a variety of foods to their daily diet and cut back on consumption of sugary drinks while upping water intake.

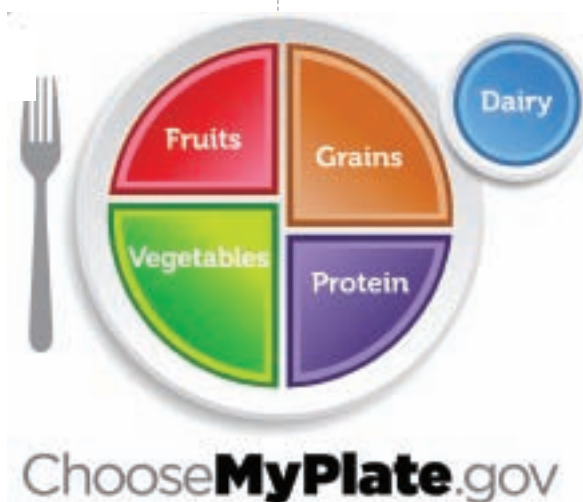
Dietitians such as Bethany Thayer, American Dietetic Association spokeswoman, praise the plate graphic for its

THE PLATE MODEL EMPHASIZES THREE MEALS A DAY BECAUSE "SKIPPING MEALS CAN BE JUST AS BAD AS OVEREATING," SAYS JIM WHITE.

"simpler, visual approach." The pyramid, says Thayer, gave "too much information" and was "too abstract and overwhelming."

By contrast, she says, "everyone knows [and recognizes] what a plate is."

Below, three registered dietitians offer tips on how adults can use the plate to guide their way to healthier eating.



Three meals a day make all the difference

The plate model emphasizes three meals a day because "skipping meals can be just as bad as overeating," says Jim White, ADA spokesman. When you miss breakfast or lunch, you tend to overcompensate or make bad decisions

on the next meal because you're starving. During the workday, unhealthy eating habits also can lead to lack of energy and confidence, not to mention stress.

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, says White, and missing it is gambling with obesity. White suggests easy breakfasts like a whole grain English muffin with peanut butter,

whole grain cereal with skim milk or a cup of yogurt plus a piece of fruit as a good way to start the day.

Healthy lunch options include chicken burritos with rice or beans (skip the cheese and sour cream but not the avocado), sandwiches on whole grain bread paired with soups and salads and veggie-heavy stir fries, according to dietitian Manuel Villacorta, founder and creator of *Eating Free*.

Size matters

Portion size also is crucial, reminds Villacorta. You may be eating all the right things, but eating too much of even healthy food can result in "growing your waistline organically," he says tactfully.

Half of your plate at each meal should be vegetables and fruit. The remaining half should be one-quarter grain and one-quarter protein. But how

much is a quarter?

When it comes to protein, says Villacorta, “talk to the hand.” Whether it be pork, chicken, lean meat or fish, your protein should be “the size of your palm.” For men, this means 5 or 6 ounces (for women, it’s more like 3 ounces, the size of a deck of cards).

Keep this in mind in restaurants, which often serve larger portions of meat and potatoes with little emphasis on vegetables. Prepare for a restaurant meal by cutting back on portion size during the day. Plan to take home restaurant leftovers and consider ordering a side vegetable or salad to round out your meal, suggests Villacorta.

Variety is the spice of life

A colorful plate is a healthy plate, contends Villacorta, so when you’re choosing vegetables, the more variety the better. “Different colors give you different

health benefits,” says Villacorta. “Don’t just do green. Don’t just do red. Add at least two or three colors.”

Remember, too, to balance starchy vegetables like potatoes and corn with leafy greens such as salads or spinach or cruciferous vegetables like broccoli and cauliflower.

Make it easy on yourself

Everyone has something they dislike eating, says White. The trick is to “find foods you do like and stick to them.” Say you’re not a fruit eater. White suggests seeking out pure juices made from concentrated fruit or mixing a fruit you do like into a smoothie with yogurt and peanut butter. If adding a little low-fat whipped cream is going to make those blueberries more palatable, White says do it.

Salads are also an easy way to load up on items that might be lacking in your diet. “Make your salad fun by adding

fruit, like oranges or dried cranberries, or nuts or cheese,” advises Rebecca Denison, doctor of integrative medicine, and diabetes educator at Greater Baltimore Medical Center in Maryland.

And don’t overlook grocery store conveniences. It can be a lot easier to build a salad or snack healthily if you buy already cut-up pineapple or “baby” varieties of vegetables like carrots and grape tomatoes.

Give yourself a day off

Face it. Even though we want to eat healthy, we also want to indulge every now and then. White says choosing one day a week to enjoy dark chocolate or a glass of red wine is a good thing. “If you can be moderate, say 100 to 150 calories, indulging once a week can help your psyche,” explains White. “As long as it’s not in excess, don’t feel guilty.”

