

## Creating a Healthy Meal Plan

### Wellness Education Unit

#### Objectives:

After completion, the reader will:

- Understand components of a healthy meal plan
- Review healthy eating guidelines: USDA and Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- Be introduced to the importance of eating more whole grain, vegetables and fruits
- Complete a self assessment of current eating habits

This education unit will provide a simple overview of nutrition and how to create a balanced diet using Choose My Plate as a reference. Choose My Plate is a program from the US Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion that is based on the latest findings about nutrition and health.

[www.ChooseMyPlate.org](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.org) offers personalized meal plans, interactive tools to help you plan and assess your food choices and advice to help you:

- Make smart choices from each food group
- Learn how to balance your food choices with physical activity
- Get the most nutrition from your calories
- Meet your daily caloric needs

There are many healthy meal plans from which to choose. Although slightly different, they all promote the following components.

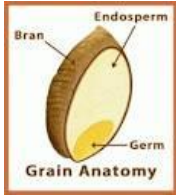
**Focus on fruits.** Fruits provide carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins and minerals. Fruits may be fresh, canned, frozen or dried. They may be whole, cut up or pureed. 100% fruit juice is also included in the fruit group. Be careful to check labels as many juices contain added sugars and very little fruit juice. If you are looking to cut calories, consider diluting fruit juice with water. Most people should eat 2 cups of fruit daily.

**Vary your veggies.** Vegetables provide carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins and minerals. Vegetables may be fresh, canned, frozen or dehydrated. They can be raw or cooked and may be whole, cut-up or mashed. 100% vegetable juice is also included in the vegetable group. Be careful to check labels and select low sodium vegetable juices when possible.

Vegetables are divided into 5 subgroups: orange, dark green, starchy, dry beans and peas and other.

Most people should eat at least 2 cups of vegetables each day with plenty of color choices.

**Make half your grains whole.** Grains include any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley or another cereal grain. Examples include hot or cold breakfast cereals, bread, pasta, tortillas, rice and crackers. Grains are divided into two subgroups: whole grains and refined grains. Whole grains contain the



entire grain kernel (the bran, endosperm and germ). Refined grains have been processed to remove the bran and germ which removes dietary fiber, iron and many B vitamins. Grain products containing “enriched” flours are refined grains.

\*Beware! Multi-grain, stone ground, 100% wheat, cracked wheat, and bran are not whole grains.

Most people need 5-6 servings of grains daily, with at least 3 servings of whole grains.

**Go lean with protein.** Foods highest in protein include beef, pork, poultry, fish, dried beans or peas, eggs, nuts, seeds and tofu. Fish, nuts, and seeds contain heart healthy oils, so choose these foods first in place of meat and poultry. Most people need 5-6 ounces of protein rich food each day. Although protein is essential for tissue growth and repair, on average Americans consume 2-3 times the recommended amount. High protein diets are associated with some cancers, heart disease, and renal insufficiency.

### Oils

Oils are fats that are liquid at room temperature. Examples include olive, canola, cottonseed, safflower, soybean and sunflower oils. These are primarily unsaturated and have been shown to help keep cholesterol levels in check. These oils are also referred to as “healthy fats”.

Include oils in your diet sparingly, choosing healthy unsaturated fats in place of saturated fats.

### Know your limits on SoFAS (Solid Fats and Added Sugars)

Solid fats are solid at room temperature. Examples include butter, chicken skin, shortening and stick margarine. These are saturated fats and should be eaten in very limited amounts. Diets high in saturated fats are associated with high cholesterol, low HDL “good” cholesterol and high LDL “bad” cholesterol.

Foods high in added sugars include soda, fruit punch, candy, cake, ice cream and sweetened cereals. These foods should not be eaten every day and should be kept to small portions.



Are you eating right?  
Rate your eating habits with this quick quiz.

How often do you:

- |  |           |           |       |
|--|-----------|-----------|-------|
| 1. Consider nutrition when making food choices?                    | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 2. Avoid skipping meals?   | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 3. Include 3 or more whole grain foods per day?                    | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 4. Eat at least 2 ½ cups of vegetables per day?                    | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 5. Vary your veggies with dark green and orange varieties?         | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 6. Eat at least 2 cups of fruit per day?                           | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 7. Get 3 cups of low-fat or fat free milk, yogurt or cheese daily? | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 8. Choose lean meats and poultry?                                  | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 9. Vary your protein with more fish, beans and nuts?               | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 10. Try to limit saturated fat and trans fat?                      | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |

Number of "Most Days" answers \_\_\_\_\_ x 2 points = \_\_\_\_\_ points

Number of "Sometimes" answers \_\_\_\_\_ x 1 point = \_\_\_\_\_ points

Number of "Never" answers \_\_\_\_\_ x 0 points = \_\_\_\_\_ points

**My total points** \_\_\_\_\_

**0-9 points** For your good health, add more smart choices to your eating plan.

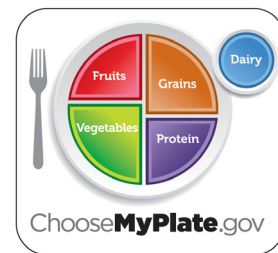
**10-15 points** You're on track. A few changes will make your total eating plan healthier.

**16-20 points** Healthy eating seems to be your habit already. Keep up the good work!

**For a personalized eating plan and more healthy tips, visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)**

# choose MyPlate

## 10 tips to a great plate



### Making food choices for a healthy lifestyle can be as simple as using these 10 Tips.

Use the ideas in this list to *balance your calories*, to choose foods to *eat more often*, and to cut back on foods to *eat less often*.

#### 1 balance calories

Find out how many calories YOU need for a day as a first step in managing your weight. Go to [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov) to find your calorie level. Being physically active also helps you balance calories.

#### 2 enjoy your food, but eat less

Take the time to fully enjoy your food as you eat it. Eating too fast or when your attention is elsewhere may lead to eating too many calories. Pay attention to hunger and fullness cues before, during, and after meals. Use them to recognize when to eat and when you've had enough.



#### 3 avoid oversized portions

Use a smaller plate, bowl, and glass. Portion out foods before you eat. When eating out, choose a smaller size option, share a dish, or take home part of your meal.

#### 4 foods to eat more often

Eat more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and fat-free or 1% milk and dairy products. These foods have the nutrients you need for health—including potassium, calcium, vitamin D, and fiber. Make them the basis for meals and snacks.



#### 5 make half your plate fruits and vegetables

Choose red, orange, and dark-green vegetables like tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and broccoli, along with other vegetables for your meals. Add fruit to meals as part of main or side dishes or as dessert.

#### 6 switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk

They have the same amount of calcium and other essential nutrients as whole milk, but fewer calories and less saturated fat.



#### 7 make half your grains whole grains

To eat more whole grains, substitute a whole-grain product for a refined product—such as eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread or brown rice instead of white rice.

#### 8 foods to eat less often

Cut back on foods high in solid fats, added sugars, and salt. They include cakes, cookies, ice cream, candies, sweetened drinks, pizza, and fatty meats like ribs, sausages, bacon, and hot dogs. Use these foods as occasional treats, not everyday foods.

#### 9 compare sodium in foods

Use the Nutrition Facts label to choose lower sodium versions of foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals. Select canned foods labeled “low sodium,” “reduced sodium,” or “no salt added.”



#### 10 drink water instead of sugary drinks

Cut calories by drinking water or unsweetened beverages. Soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks are a major source of added sugar, and calories, in American diets.