



Extension News Column

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To: Mary Beth Smetzer, community news editor, News-Miner, 459-7546 (wk), 452-7917 (fax), msmetzer@newsminer.com, and people@newsminer.com
From: Roxie Dinstel
Re: Regular CES column to run Tuesday, Oct. 4, on Our Town page
Contact: Debbie Carter, information officer, 474-5406, dscarter@alaska.edu

After devoting decades to designing a food pyramid, then honing and refining that design, the nation's nutrition experts have settled on what they believe is the perfect geometry to represent what we should eat — a plate.

The simple truth is that we eat on plates, not pyramids. So, this new symbol of how to eat should be easier to understand. Everyone can relate to what you put on the plate.

Arriving in the midst of an obesity epidemic, this new at-a-glance guide to healthful eating is meant to remind consumers to limit heavy foods and beef up on the greens.

“MyPlate” promotes fruits and vegetables, which cover half the circle. Grains occupy an additional quarter, as do proteins such as meat, fish and poultry. A glass of milk rests to the side. Desserts have been banished.

It is simple, and shows how the average American can look at and get a visual feel for how they can fill up a plate at a meal. From a practical point of view, the plate image will help people make better food choices.

Many nutritionists said the pyramid had become too complicated for people to understand easily. The plate symbol is part of a healthy eating initiative that will convey seven key messages from the government's dietary guidelines:

- **Enjoy your food, but eat less.** The reality is that we simply eat too much. We've become a nation of snackers who are constantly eating. We are consuming more calories. So, make your choices count. Eat what you love, but just in smaller amounts.
- **Avoid oversized portions.** The trick to eating the right sized portion is to know what a serving should be. A serving of meat is 2 to 3 ounces. That is about the size of the palm of your hand. We are talking about the burger in a kiddy burger, not those great big oversized ones.

- **Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.** Fruits and vegetables are powerhouses of nutrition with few calories. Any time you increase your consumption, you will get lots of vitamins A and C, potassium, and other valuable vitamins and minerals. These are all at a cost of 50 calories for a ½ cup serving of vegetables, and 100 calories for a serving of fruit.

- **Make at least half your grains whole grains.** Most of us don't get enough fiber in our diet, so we should choose whole grain products. Whole grains are cereal grains that contain the germ, endosperm and bran, in contrast to refined grains that retain only the endosperm. Whole grains are a natural source of protein as well as a source of carbohydrates and are made into many different kinds of foods. Choose oatmeal, brown rice, quinoa and other whole grain products. With processed foods, such as bread, look for the ingredient list with the most whole grains.

- **Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk.** Compared to whole and 2 percent milk, skim and 1 percent milk have less artery-clogging fat, but the same amount of the good stuff — calcium, protein, vitamin D, potassium, and other vitamins and minerals.

- **Compare sodium in food.** Check out the labels on foods like like soup, bread and frozen meals — and choose the foods with lower numbers. Most Americans consume more salt than they need. The current recommendation is to consume less than 2400 mg of sodium a day. That equals about 1 teaspoon of table salt a day. On average, we are getting about 5,000 mg of sodium — twice as much as we need. Most of this sodium is in processed foods, so read the labels.

- **Drink water instead of sugary drinks.** You need 8 cups of water each day. Unfortunately, many people drink sodas instead of water, adding additional calories with no nutritional benefit.

Changing our dietary habits is not easy. But we can make small steps to improving our diets by following these guidelines. For more information on the new icon and other dietary information, check out the website at www.choosemyplate.gov.

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