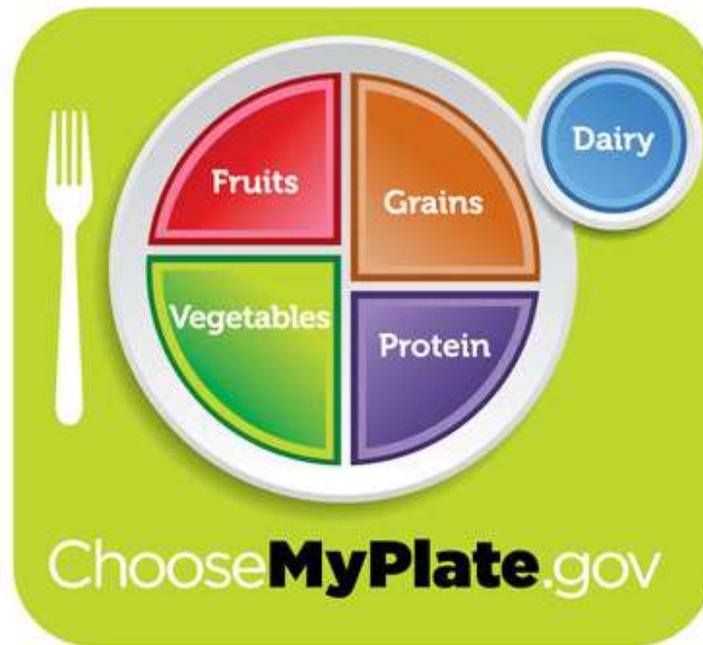


## WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE?

When thinking about what to serve at mealtime, the MyPlate diagram put out by the USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) just made your life a little easier. It is designed to help you feed your family the right amount of the right food. As First Lady Michelle Obama said, "Parents don't have the time to measure out exactly three ounces of chicken or to look up how much rice or broccoli is in a serving. But we do have time to take a look at our kids' plates. And as long as they're eating proper portions, as long as half of their meal is fruits and vegetables alongside their lean proteins, whole grains and low-fat dairy, then we're good. It's as simple as that."



The portions measure out to 25% grains, 25% protein, and on the other side it's 30% vegetables and 20% fruit. Don't forget the dairy circle. Does this have to be at every meal? No. But it's the ratio you want to see in what your child eats during a day. And you too; it's meant for all of us.

This picture doesn't tell you how big the plate should be, but it's a *very* good idea to use one that's no more than 8 or 9 inches across. If it is larger than that, you might be tempted to pile on more food. Then even though the proportions may be correct, you are going to eat too much. So, no cheating please by using plates which are twice the size as normal.

If you just serve foods that roughly fall into these categories, you'll be off to a good start. But you are off to the best start if you serve foods that are the healthiest.

**Protein**-rich foods include poultry, beef and seafood. The lower the fat content the better. If you can, don't serve red meat too often. Try to avoid processed meats because they are loaded with sodium. Other good sources of protein are eggs, nuts and seeds, tofu, veggie burgers, dry beans and peas. There's a lot to choose from!



**Grains** should ideally be whole grains. Think about oatmeal, brown rice and whole wheat bread. Even corn on the cob or popcorn count! A great thing about whole grains is they can help you feel full so you don't overeat.



**Fruits** can easily be served at any meal or as a snack. Eat every color you can think of like red and green apples, purple and green grapes, pink and white grapefruit, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and all of those delicious melons. You can always serve them as smoothies too. One way to think of it is you should eat a rainbow of them (**red, orange, yellow, green, purple**)!

**Vegetables** don't have to be scary. Even though you might want to count french fries or potatoes, please *don't*. They're full of quickly digested starch which will have a big effect on your mood and blood sugar. Most kids love carrots. That's a good place to start. You can serve almost all vegetables either raw or cooked. You can add a low calorie and nutritious dipping sauce too.

**Dairy** can be milk, yogurt, cheese. Low-fat is preferred for children over two. Calcium-fortified soy milk is also included in the dairy group. Your body will appreciate that calcium especially as you get older. Dairy products are also important sources of vitamin D and protein. Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium and use it for healthy bones and teeth. Don't forget to drink a lot of water too.



Where does the oil/fats go on this plate? You're advised to use such a small amount of it that it didn't make it to the picture. Oils *do* provide important nutrients and are recommended, but dietary guidelines say to limit oils and solid fats (like butter, cream, margarine, lard and shortening). These foods provide what are considered empty calories and have little or no nutritional value.

What else is missing from this plate? Sweets, treats and desserts that most people, especially little people, want. This is where you're allowed to be a little sneaky with your children. Fruit and yogurt with some nuts on top. Baked apples. Fruit popsicles and ices (made with real fruit juice). Cheesecake made with cottage cheese. Oatmeal cookies. Frozen grapes. The web is full of healthy recipes with many easy to create to indulge your kids' sweet tooth.



Remember that eating shouldn't only be nutritious and healthy...it should be fun!

Ask for suggestions from family members. Your plate might not always look like the USDA one; but if you get the recommended foods in every day, you can splurge once in a while on something else. And if you put on your thinking cap, you'll find a way to makes those other foods healthier too.

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