

# HEALTHY NUTRITION

## CLIMBING THE PYRAMID OR JUST HANGING ON THE PLATE? WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

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The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) released new Dietary Guidelines and with that switched from the more commonly known Food Guide Pyramid to a new visual image called **MyPlate**. While both images show what proportion of each food group should be consumed, the pyramid image was confusing because it could not be easily applied to daily eating habits. MyPlate provides a visual of a "place setting" that more universally communicates to consumers how to optimize each meal and provides a "symbol" of how they should be eating.

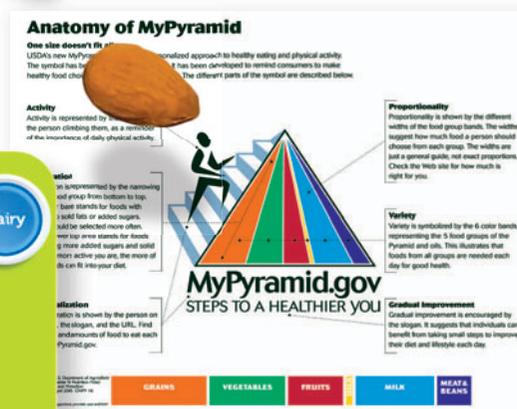
### WHAT IS MYPLATE?

The MyPlate graphic is a dinner-sized plate that is sectioned into the basic food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, protein and dairy. This image offers a simple solution to help people understand the need for appropriate serving sizes without counting calories. MyPlate suggests a focus on vegetables and grains, with fruit and protein each playing a more complementary role in the diet. Dairy is not included on the plate, but is represented by a circle at the side.

Fruits and vegetables should make up 1/2 the plate and emphasizes the importance these foods have not only to weight maintenance but also to their contribution to preventative health, which is particularly important to young athletes and their families to maintain optimal performance. Protein makes up less than a 1/4 of the plate and demonstrates a greater emphasis on protein quality rather than quantity. The total amount of protein suggested for daily consumption

for those 9 years of age and older is 5–7 ounces with a focus on protein from plant sources. Young athletes may need more depending on their growth velocity. Grains make up more than 1/4 of the plate and the suggestion is to eat more than half of these as whole grains.

### MYPYRAMID VS MYPLATE: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?



There are a number of differences between the former dietary guidelines' MyPyramid and the new guidelines as depicted by MyPlate. Besides the

visual aspect, the "pyramid" focused more on physical activity and offered structured guidelines for active living and weight maintenance. The focus of the "plate" is more on portion control with a couple of important additions. These include the recommendations to reduce sodium intake and increase water consumption – something that was not included before. Another important point of the plate concept is that everyone should "enjoy their food" and eat meals more often as a family – parents are their children's best role models with respect to what they should eat and drink.

### HOW DO I APPLY MYPLATE TO MYEVERYDAY?

If you are active, then what you eat is even more important to your everyday performance and to help you reach your goals. National data suggest that nutrient



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intakes of most youth are inadequate in a number of vitamins and minerals including: folate, vitamins A and E, iron, zinc, magnesium, and calcium. Fiber intake among adolescents is also lower than recommended. Using MyPlate can assist you in building a better menu that does not have to be complicated to put together.

Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of folate, vitamin A and fiber. Poor eating habits and tissue injury can put you at risk for folate deficiency, which is important for maintaining healthy DNA. Vitamin A is an important antioxidant as well as being crucial for good eyesight and maintaining healthy skin and healing processes. Fiber is important for healthy GI function. Making sure that fruits and vegetables fill up half of the plate at each meal will ensure you are getting enough of these important nutrients. Pay attention to the color of your fruits and vegetables and eat a rainbow of options – dark green and deep orange varieties are the richest sources. Whole grains, especially those that are fortified, are also good sources of folate and fiber. Try eating whole wheat pasta with a veggie sauté for a great power lunch!

Iron and zinc are found primarily in high protein foods but don't be fooled into thinking that animal sources are your only choice. In fact, pumpkin seeds, pistachios and tofu have higher quantities of iron per ½ cup serving than beef! Raw or lightly roasted nuts are nature's original fast foods and make easy-to-carry snacks for on-the-go. Beans and fish are also good sources of iron. Fish from the sea such as salmon and halibut have the added benefit of containing omega-3 fatty acids – natural anti-inflammatories. Remember – iron is important as a carrier of oxygen in the blood as well as playing a key role in collagen synthesis and neurotransmitter function. Zinc is involved in protein synthesis – all important functions for a



growing athlete! Even though MyPlate recommends that protein sources make up less than a ¼ of your meal, keep in mind that protein quality is key.

Nuts are also a good source of vitamin E and magnesium. Vitamin E is an important antioxidant and plays a role in reducing inflammation and preventing cellular injury from oxidative stress – something that occurs daily if you are engaging in vigorous physical activity. Magnesium is food for your muscles and figures prominently in muscle contraction and nerve impulse transmission. Sunflower seeds, peanuts and almonds should also be included in your daily trail mix to get enough of these nutrients.

Don't forget your calcium! The circle at the side of the plate is meant to remind us to include dairy at breakfast, lunch and dinner. For young athletes, calcium means strong bones, but it also plays a role in nerve transmission and maintaining normal heart rhythm. Whether you include a glass of lowfat or nonfat milk with your meals, sprinkle cheese on your vegetables or pasta, or eat fruit and yogurt as a snack, you will be making sure that your bones and heart are reaching their peak capacity.

Finally, hydration is key for young athletes and water alone is not always enough. While sports drinks can be used in moderation, they can be exchanged for healthier options such as combining fresh juices (e.g., apple) in combination with mineral water in a one-third: two-thirds mix to get the same effect and avoid the high fructose corn syrup.

For more information on how to include MyPlate ideas to plan healthy meals for you and your family visit: [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov). ✨

