

## Celebrate National Nutrition Month® by Rethinking Your Plate



**By: Donna L. Hollinger MS, RD, LD**

The face of healthy eating took on a fresh new look this past summer. MyPlate replaced MyPyramid as the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s new dietary icon. While opinions on how best to convey USDA's nutrition guidelines abound, most nutrition experts prefer MyPlate to the past pyramids.

So Plate versus Pyramid – how do the nutrition messages differ?

**MyPlate places a new focus on enjoying food.** Embrace eating as a positive experience; not a mindless one or a source of guilt or worry. Take the time to savor the sweetness of a Clementine, the crispness of a peapod, or the nutty flavor of a slice of whole grain bread. Be open to trying new foods or food combinations. Tune into feelings of hunger and fullness and using them as a guide for when to eat and when you've eaten enough.

**MyPlate puts more emphasis on a direction to aim for versus exact amounts.** While MyPyramid recommended specific daily quantities of food to be eaten from each food group, MyPlate features a directional approach suggesting foods to eat more often and foods to eat less often.

Foods to eat more of include a variety of fruits and vegetables, especially those that are red, orange or dark green, with the recommendation to make them half of your plate. Choosing whole grains is encouraged along with selecting 1% fat or fat-free milk and dairy products.

Foods to eat less of include, not surprisingly, foods high in solid (saturated) fats, added sugars, and salt. To decrease these foods, consider using oils in place of solid fats in food preparation, drinking water instead of sugar-sweetened drinks, and replacing processed snack items with whole foods.

**MyPlate changes the name of the Meat & Beans food group to the Protein group.** This change has generated some confusion since protein is not a food, but rather a nutrient found in foods. Nomenclature aside, the foods included in this group are the same. MyPlate promotes varying your protein choices while making seafood your choice twice a week. Eating beans, which are naturally rich in protein and fiber, is also encouraged.

Is going from a pyramid to a plate enough to change people's eating habits? Perhaps not. Eating is a personal issue shaped by factors such as family habits, values, and food preferences. However, if you're interested in moving toward healthier eating, MyPlate offers a practical place to start.

#####

Donna L. Hollinger MS, RD, LD is a registered dietitian in the Nutrition Center at the UI College of Public Health. The Nutrition Center focuses on research, education and counseling in nutrition and lifestyle change. Contact her at [donna-hollinger@uiowa.edu](mailto:donna-hollinger@uiowa.edu).