

## MyPlate's Message: Proportions

Written by Joy Venhorst  
Friday, 10 June 2011 13:00

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AMES, Iowa – The USDA released the new food icon “MyPlate” on June 2, 2011. The intent of the new icon is to simplify the dietary guidance included in the Dietary Guidelines 2010 and MyPyramid. MyPlate is not intended to replace MyPyramid; instead, MyPlate simplifies the message to make it easier for Americans to make healthful food choices.

“The key message of MyPlate is the proportion each food group should contribute to your plate,” said Sarah Francis, an Iowa State University assistant professor and state nutrition extension specialist. “The icon conveys that half of your plate should consist of fruits and vegetables, with vegetables comprising slightly more than the fruits. The other half of the plate consists of grains and proteins, with grains comprising slightly more than the protein. Dairy is depicted as a circle — signifying a glass of milk — off to the side of the plate.”

While the new icon has many positive aspects, some people have concerns. Ruth Litchfield, an Iowa State University associate professor and state nutrition extension specialist, feels the term “protein” may be confusing or misleading. “MyPlate uses the term ‘protein,’ which is a nutrient rather than a food group. While many equate the term protein with meat, fish and poultry, excellent sources of protein also include dried beans, peas and lentils.” In addition to the icon, several nutrition messages accompany MyPlate. These include:

### Balance Calories

- Enjoy your food, but eat less.
- Avoid oversized portions.

### Foods to Increase

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Make at least half of your grains whole grains.
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk.

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### Foods to Reduce

- Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread and frozen meals – and choose the foods with lower numbers.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.

Litchfield is concerned about the message relative to sodium intake. “National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that a number of foods contribute more sodium to our daily diet than soup. For example, you also need to check the sodium content of prepared chicken and mixed chicken dishes, pizza, pasta and pasta dishes, coldcuts and cheese, among others. Most Americans need more guidance regarding where sodium is found and how to decrease sodium intake.”

Francis emphasized, “The messages of MyPlate remain consistent with messages from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010 and MyPyramid. The real benefit of MyPlate is the simple, concise message of proportionality on your plate.”

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