

July 11

# Culinary Nutrition News: The Dish on MyPlate

Provided through a partnership between ACEFF Chef & Child Foundation and Clemson University, and sponsored by French's Foodservice.

In the realm of culinary nutrition, we have continued to perpetuate the concept of “less is more,” especially when speaking in terms of sodium, fat and portions. Continuing on this less-is-more perspective comes the unveiling of the latest food icon by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), MyPlate. And if there is one thing to note about this new icon, it is its utter simplicity. Gone are the specific instructions and illustrations of foods and their groupings, as the ultimate purpose of this model is to be a quick and simple reminder for those of you who are not registered dietitians or trained nutritionists. Before we can come to understanding of today’s food icon, we should first journey back through the history of the government’s attempts at regulating the eating habits of Americans.

## Food wheels, pyramids and plates

Before there was a food plate, there was a food pyramid, and before that, there was a food wheel. In 1943, the federal government designed the food wheel to help Americans deal with the shortage of food supplies due to World War II. More of a buying guide than an eating guide, this wheel featured the Basic 7, which was a reduction from the original 12 basic food groups identified in 1933 in response to the economic constraints of the depression. The Basic 7 consisted of the following:

1. Milk
2. Vegetables
3. Fruits
4. Eggs
5. Meat, cheese, fish and poultry
6. Cereal and bread
7. Butter

However, its complexity and lack of specifics regarding serving sizes led to the need for modification. In 1956, the USDA released a new food guide that represented a foundation diet, known as the Basic 4. This guide recommended a minimum number of foods from each of four food groups: milk, meat, fruits and vegetables, and grain products. After two decades of the Basic 4, the USDA issued the “Hassle-Free Guide to a Better Diet” in 1979, which included a fifth food group for fats, sweets and alcoholic beverages.

Responding to the public’s need for authoritative guidance on diet and health,

the first edition of “Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans” was published in 1980. These guidelines encouraged the consumption of a variety of foods to provide the essential nutrients while maintaining recommended body weight and moderating dietary constituents that might be risk factors in certain chronic diseases, such as fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium. These guidelines prompted the development of a new food guide that would help consumers implement the guidelines into their daily food choices. The Food Guide Pyramid was introduced in 1992 as a revamped edition of the “Hassle-Free Guide to a Better Diet,” with the objective of helping consumers put the Dietary Guidelines into action.

The MyPyramid Plan was released in 2005 as an improvement of earlier food guide pyramids and incorporated the latest dietary recommendations from the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It was tailored to fit most people based on different characteristics such as age, gender, level of activity and lactation. Additional customization was available online and allowed people to adjust their diet for weight loss, maintenance or gain. In addition to the basic version, there were other U.S. pyramids for specific ethnic groups (Mediterranean, Asian, Latin American) as well as a vegetarian pyramid.

This brings us to the recently unveiled food guide, MyPlate. Perhaps the most obvious



Food guides have been released by the U.S. government since 1943, when the food wheel was created to help Americans deal with the shortage of food supplies due to World War II.

difference between the pyramids of the past and today's icon is the shape. As Bonnie Taub-Dix, a registered dietitian in New York told *USA Today*, "We eat on plates, not pyramids." However, another major difference comes by way of its informative contribution or lack thereof. While previous food guides have been viewed as overly complicated, today's simple model could very well be considered an understatement—a hopefully effective understatement given the 122-page document of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans on which MyPlate is based.

## Power of the plate

While the new plate icon may not be able to tell us everything we need to know about what we should and should not eat, it does provide a quick reminder to be mindful of what we are eating. America's obesity problem begins with a portion problem, and portions are the emphasis of MyPlate. The plate icon contains four sections, with fruits and vegetables claiming half the plate while protein and grains take up the other. A small circle sits beside the plate for dairy.

It may come as a shock for some that protein is not the largest segment of the plate, because we have been conditioned to center meals around meat. Another point worth noting is the fact that "protein" has replaced the category formally known as "meat and beans," making it more inclusive of seafood and vegetarian protein options. There is also a noticeable absence of any designation for sugars, fats and oils on the new icon. The big question is whether or not the plate will have more influence than its previous pyramid counterparts as we strive to combat childhood obesity.

## Using the plate

MyPlate illustrates the five food groups (fruits, vegetables, grains, protein and dairy) using a familiar mealtime visual, a place setting. While some may wonder what the actual size of the plate is, the

focus should be on the ratio of each food group symbolized in proportion to the others on the plate. There may be very little instructional input on the actual icon; however, for those who wish for more extensive guidance, MyPlate's website, [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov), provides practical information and tips for building a healthier diet. For example, the website offers extensive details for each of the five food groups depicted. The information for each group includes the following:

- What's in the group?
- How much is needed?
- What counts as a(n) cup/ounce?
- Health benefits/implications and nutrients
- Tips for making wise choices
- Recipes

The website also features the following selected messages to help consumers focus on key behaviors:

<b>Balancing calories</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Enjoy your food, but eat less.</li> <li>-Avoid oversized portions.</li> </ul>
<b>Foods to increase</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.</li> <li>-Make at least half your grains whole grains.</li> <li>-Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk</li> </ul>
<b>Foods to reduce</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Compare sodium in foods such as soup, bread and frozen meals; and choose the foods with lower numbers.</li> <li>-Drink water instead of sugary drinks.</li> </ul>

## Sugar, fats and oils

While sugars, fats and oils no longer have a visible designation on the new icon, the website does feature sections dedicated to oils and empty calories, as well as physical activities. Oils are not acknowledged as a food group, but they do provide essential nutrients. Therefore, oils are included in USDA food patterns. Empty calories are defined as calories from solid fats and/or added sugars. Solid fats and added sugars add calories to the food, but few or no nutrients. For this reason, the calories from



The MyPyramid Plan was released in 2005 as an improvement on earlier food guide pyramids, and incorporated the latest dietary recommendations.

solid fats and added sugars in a food are often called empty calories. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends replacing protein foods that are higher in solid fats with choices that are lower in solid fats and calories and/or are sources of oils, and using oils to replace solid fats where possible.

Solid fats are fats that are solid at room temperature, such as beef fat, butter and shortening, whether from animal products or from vegetable oils that have been hydrogenated (trans fats). Some solid fats are found naturally in foods. They can also be added when foods are processed by food companies or when they are prepared.



The latest food guide, MyPlate, which was released in June 2011, is far less complicated than previous guides, and appears on a plate rather than a pyramid.

Added sugars are sugars and syrups that are added when foods or beverages are processed or prepared.

The foods and beverages that provide the most empty calories for Americans are:

- Cakes, cookies, pastries and donuts (contain both solid fat and added sugars)
- Sodas, energy drinks, sports drinks and fruit drinks (contain added sugars)
- Cheese (contains solid fat)
- Pizza (contains solid fat)
- Ice cream (contains both solid fat and added sugars)
- Sausages, hot dogs, bacon and ribs (contain solid fat)

*Andrea Musselwhite, Clemson University's Culinary Nutrition Undergraduate Student Research Group, made contributions to this article.*

*Dr. Margaret D. Condrasky, RD, CCE, is an associate professor of Food Science and Human Nutrition at Clemson University. She leads the CU CHEFS® program for improving culinary nutrition skills.*

*Marie Hegler is a graduate of the Food Science and Human Nutrition department with a culinary science emphasis at Clemson University, which operates the CU CHEFS® program for improving culinary nutrition skills.*

## About the American Culinary Federation and the Chef & Child Foundation



The American Culinary Federation, Inc., established in 1929, is the premier professional organization for culinarians in North America. With more than 20,000 members in 225 chapters nationwide, ACF is the culinary leader in offering educational

resources, training, apprenticeship and accreditation. In addition, ACF operates the most comprehensive certification program for chefs in the United States. ACF is home to ACF Culinary Team USA, the official representative for the United States in major international culinary competitions, and to the Chef & Child Foundation, founded in 1989 to promote proper nutrition in children and to combat childhood obesity. For more information, visit [www.acfchefs.org](http://www.acfchefs.org).

## About Clemson University



CU CHEFS® (Clemson University's Cooking and Healthy Eating Food Specialists) instructional program, led by Dr. Margaret Condrasky, associate professor in Food Science and Human Nutrition, is a registered trademark of Clemson University designed to promote changes in menu planning, food purchasing, food preparation and food consumption behaviors with a goal of fostering good health through healthy nutrition. "Culinary nutrition" is the application of nutrition principles combined with food science knowledge displayed through a mastery of culinary skills. The results are healthy eating behaviors grounded in culinary confidence and nutrition alertness. CU CHEFS® promotes an awareness of the latest trends in foods and nutrition through the demonstration of proficient culinary skills to produce flavorful, health-inspired menus for schools, churches and restaurants. Clemson University, located in Clemson, S.C., is ranked 22 among the nation's top public institutions. Since 2001, Clemson has doubled external research funding, raised the academic profile of the student body, increased retention and graduation rates, launched high-profile economic development and earned national accolades, including being named *Time's* Public College of the Year.

## About French's Foodservice



French's Foodservice is proud to sponsor this series of nutritional articles authored by Clemson University for the ACFEF's Chef & Child Foundation. At French's Foodservice, we believe that "you are what you serve," and have built our reputation by providing the highest-quality ingredients to meet the ever-changing needs of the foodservice industry. As chefs, restaurateurs, educators and nutritionists, you positively impact the health of our nation by advocating the positive impact of healthy eating, especially among children. We are proud to support this worthy cause.

Over the last 100 years, French's has become one of the most recognized and respected brands in America. Today, the French's Foodservice family of brands delivers the highest-quality, most flavorful products possible. For the brands your patrons know and love and the incredible flavors that enhance everything from soups and salads to sandwiches and entrées, entrust your patrons to the flavors of French's.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**USDA's MyPlate** is part of a larger communications initiative based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans to help consumers make better food choices, and is designed to remind Americans to eat healthfully; it is not intended to change consumer behavior alone.

Visit: [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

**Dietary Guidelines for Americans**, 2010 by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) is based on the most recent scientific evidence review. The document provides information and advice for choosing a healthy eating pattern—namely, one that focuses on nutrient-dense foods and beverages, and that contributes to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. Such a healthy eating pattern also embodies food safety principles to avoid foodborne illness.

Visit: [www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm)