

# Rating the plate

By Andrea Weigl  
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The plate has toppled the pyramid.

This month, first lady Michelle Obama unveiled the government's latest effort to combat the nation's obesity epidemic: a plate showing how big - or small - our daily portions of protein, fruits, vegetables, grains and dairy products should be.

Nutritionists cheered the death of the food pyramid, the diagram that the U.S. Department of Agriculture used from 1992 to 2011.

"The pyramid was so confusing," says Cheryl Kuhta-Sutter, a registered dietitian with Presbyterian Novant Health & Wellness in Charlotte. "It wasn't easy for children to learn. It wasn't easy for adults to follow. It wasn't easy to teach."

Despite its almost 20-year reign, the pyramid's flaws were numerous, dietitians say. It wasn't visually intuitive. It was too complicated. It allowed too many daily categories. It created a state of confusion among the public.

A plate, they say, is so much better.

"Visually, it's easier to understand," says Ashley Honeycutt, a registered dietitian with Rex Wellness Center in Raleigh. "Kids can recognize the plate. It just makes more sense."

Besides, Kuhta-Sutter says, dietitians have been using a plate as a teaching tool for years.

The plate's emphasis on fruits and vegetables is a healthier message. "It decreases the portion size of the higher-fat, higher-calorie items," says Melissa

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**Breakfast:** 1 cup shredded wheat cereal, 1 tablespoon raisins and 1 cup fat-free milk; 1 small banana, 1 slice whole-wheat toast with 1 teaspoon soft margarine and 1 teaspoon jelly.

**Lunch:** 3 ounces sliced low-sodium smoked turkey breast, 2 tomato slices, 1/4 cup romaine lettuce, 1 tablespoon mayo-type salad dressing and 1 teaspoon mustard on a whole-wheat pita; 1/2 cup apple slices and 1 cup tomato juice.

**Dinner:** 5 ounces grilled top-loin steak, 3/4 cup mashed potatoes with 2 teaspoons soft margarine, 1/2 cup steamed carrots with 1 tablespoon honey, 2-ounce whole-wheat dinner roll with 1 teaspoon soft margarine and 1 cup fat-free milk.

**More menus:** [www.choosemyplate.gov/tips/resources/menus.html](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/tips/resources/menus.html)

- [Protein](#)

Look for these recommended sources: lean red meats, beans, eggs, soy products, poultry, seafood and nuts and seeds.

**Daily serving:** 5-6 ounces.

## Dairy

Choose fat-free or low-fat (1%) dairy products, such as cheese, milk and yogurt. Soymilk also counts. Dairy products that have little or no calcium, such as cream, cream cheese or butter, do not count toward the daily recommended amount.

Herrmann with Eat Smart Nutrition Co. in Huntersville.

### The plate's main messages:

Fruits and vegetables should fill half the plate.

You should choose low-fat or nonfat dairy products.

You should opt for lean proteins, such as poultry, seafood, beans and soy products.

The government recommends that adult men who exercise at least 30 minutes a day consume no more than 2,400 daily calories, while adult women should consume no more than 2,000 calories.

The dietitians offered additional tips about the plate:

Dairy is not optional, even though it's off to the side of the plate, where a glass would be.

Eliminate sugary drinks from your diet. Drink 100-percent-fruit juice, low-fat or nonfat milk or water instead.

Watch your portion size. Plates have gotten bigger in recent years. Make sure your plate isn't the size of a platter.

Eggs are protein, even though they are sold in the dairy aisle.

Limit butter and cheese sauces on your vegetables.

It is healthier to bake, broil or grill lean proteins than to fry them.

Eliminate solid fats, such as butter and shortening to avoid empty calories and added sugars, such as those in energy drinks, sports drinks, sodas, cakes and cookies.



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**Daily serving:** 3 cups.

#### Grains

Select whole grains such as whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta, bulgur, brown rice and oatmeal. Limit refined grains, such as white rice, white bread, grits, pretzels. Make at least half of your grains whole grain.

**Daily serving:** about 6 ounces, or 3/4 cup.

#### Vegetables

Choose nonstarchy vegetables, such as asparagus, peppers or greens, instead of potatoes, corn or lima beans. The darker the color, the better. Half of your plate should be fruits and vegetables.

**Daily serving:** 2 1/2 to 3 cups.

#### Fruit

Select fresh, canned, frozen or dried fruits; 100-percent-fruit juice also counts in this category.

**Daily servings:** 2 1/2 to 3 cups.

• [Want to learn more?](#)

The federal government's new website is [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov).

To quickly look up nutrition information, go to [www.myfoodapedia.gov](http://www.myfoodapedia.gov).

To read nutrition labels and reviews of healthy products at the grocery store, go to [www.supermarketsavvy.com](http://www.supermarketsavvy.com).

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