

## Creating a Healthy Meal Plan

### Wellness Education Unit

#### **Objectives:**

After completion, the reader will:

- Understand components of a healthy meal plan
- Review healthy eating guidelines: USDA and Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- Be introduced to the importance of eating more whole grain, vegetables and fruits
- Complete a self assessment of current eating habits

This education unit will provide a simple overview of nutrition and how to create a balanced diet using Choose My Plate as a reference. Choose My Plate is a program from the US Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion that is based on the latest findings about nutrition and health.

[www.ChooseMyPlate.org](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.org) offers personalized meal plans, interactive tools to help you plan and assess your food choices and advice to help you:

- Make smart choices from each food group
- Learn how to balance your food choices with physical activity
- Get the most nutrition from your calories
- Meet your daily caloric needs

There are many healthy meal plans from which to choose. Although slightly different, they all promote the following components.

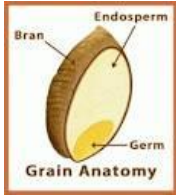
**Focus on fruits.** Fruits provide carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins and minerals. Fruits may be fresh, canned, frozen or dried. They may be whole, cut up or pureed. 100% fruit juice is also included in the fruit group. Be careful to check labels as many juices contain added sugars and very little fruit juice. If you are looking to cut calories, consider diluting fruit juice with water. Most people should eat 2 cups of fruit daily.

**Vary your veggies.** Vegetables provide carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins and minerals. Vegetables may be fresh, canned, frozen or dehydrated. They can be raw or cooked and may be whole, cut-up or mashed. 100% vegetable juice is also included in the vegetable group. Be careful to check labels and select low sodium vegetable juices when possible.

Vegetables are divided into 5 subgroups: orange, dark green, starchy, dry beans and peas and other.

Most people should eat at least 2 cups of vegetables each day with plenty of color choices.

**Make half your grains whole.** Grains include any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley or another cereal grain. Examples include hot or cold breakfast cereals, bread, pasta, tortillas, rice and crackers. Grains are divided into two subgroups: whole grains and refined grains. Whole grains contain the



entire grain kernel (the bran, endosperm and germ). Refined grains have been processed to remove the bran and germ which removes dietary fiber, iron and many B vitamins. Grain products containing “enriched” flours are refined grains.

\*Beware! Multi-grain, stone ground, 100% wheat, cracked wheat, and bran are not whole grains.

Most people need 5-6 servings of grains daily, with at least 3 servings of whole grains.

**Go lean with protein.** Foods highest in protein include beef, pork, poultry, fish, dried beans or peas, eggs, nuts, seeds and tofu. Fish, nuts, and seeds contain heart healthy oils, so choose these foods first in place of meat and poultry. Most people need 5-6 ounces of protein rich food each day. Although protein is essential for tissue growth and repair, on average Americans consume 2-3 times the recommended amount. High protein diets are associated with some cancers, heart disease, and renal insufficiency.

### **Oils**

Oils are fats that are liquid at room temperature. Examples include olive, canola, cottonseed, safflower, soybean and sunflower oils. These are primarily unsaturated and have been shown to help keep cholesterol levels in check. These oils are also referred to as “healthy fats”.

Include oils in your diet sparingly, choosing healthy unsaturated fats in place of saturated fats.

### **Know your limits on SoFAS (Solid Fats and Added Sugars)**

Solid fats are solid at room temperature. Examples include butter, chicken skin, shortening and stick margarine. These are saturated fats and should be eaten in very limited amounts. Diets high in saturated fats are associated with high cholesterol, low HDL “good” cholesterol and high LDL “bad” cholesterol.

Foods high in added sugars include soda, fruit punch, candy, cake, ice cream and sweetened cereals. These foods should not be eaten every day and should be kept to small portions.



Are you eating right?  
Rate your eating habits with this quick quiz.

How often do you:

- |  |           |           |       |
|--|-----------|-----------|-------|
| 1. Consider nutrition when making food choices?                    | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 2. Avoid skipping meals?   | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 3. Include 3 or more whole grain foods per day?                    | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 4. Eat at least 2 ½ cups of vegetables per day?                    | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 5. Vary your veggies with dark green and orange varieties?         | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 6. Eat at least 2 cups of fruit per day?                           | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 7. Get 3 cups of low-fat or fat free milk, yogurt or cheese daily? | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 8. Choose lean meats and poultry?                                  | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 9. Vary your protein with more fish, beans and nuts?               | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |
| 10. Try to limit saturated fat and trans fat?                      | Most Days | Sometimes | Never |

Number of "Most Days" answers \_\_\_\_\_ x 2 points = \_\_\_\_\_ points

Number of "Sometimes" answers \_\_\_\_\_ x 1 point = \_\_\_\_\_ points

Number of "Never" answers \_\_\_\_\_ x 0 points = \_\_\_\_\_ points

**My total points** \_\_\_\_\_

**0-9 points** For your good health, add more smart choices to your eating plan.

**10-15 points** You're on track. A few changes will make your total eating plan healthier.

**16-20 points** Healthy eating seems to be your habit already. Keep up the good work!

**For a personalized eating plan and more healthy tips, visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)**

