Shaping up your plate

The phrase “I need to get into shape” is a familiar one. But what about getting your plate in shape? MyPlate(www.choosemyplate.gov) provides an easy-to-understand visual of what plates should look like at meals. Eating is meant to be enjoyable, but it is important to be mindful of portion size and content of foods. Find creative ways to make your plate look like the MyPlate symbol with half of the plate consisting of fruits and vegetables, one-quarter lean protein, and one-quarter whole grains with a side of low-fat dairy.

Here are some tips to get you started with shaping up your plate.

Think about the size of plate you currently use when eating. Is it large or small? Try switching to a plate no larger than 9 - 10 inches. If that looks too large and provides too much food, try a smaller plate. Your plate will look full even though you are actually eating less food. This will help you decrease calories and assist in weight management. Pile your plate with nutrient-dense, low-calorie foods like fruits, vegetables, lean meat, beans and whole grains.

Sometimes our eyes deceive us when it comes to filling our plates. You may think you have only eaten one cup of ice cream when you have really eaten three cups. Measure out different foods into the dishes you use at home – fill your cereal bowl with one cup of dry cereal, put one-half cup of brown rice on your plate, and fill your favorite glass with 8 ounces of liquid.

Note how the different portions look in or on your own dishes. This also gives you a reference to use when eating away from home. Portion sizes at restaurants are typically much larger than recommended and provide extra calories, fat and sodium. Preparing and eating meals at home will give you more control over what ingredients are being
used in your food (i.e. less salt, less butter, leaner meat) and the portion size you serve. Preparing and eating meals at home will also help you stretch your food dollars.

Beverages also make up our “plate.” The type of beverages and amount you consume can add many calories to your daily intake. Fruit juices and drinks, sports drinks, soda, drinks with added sugar like sweetened tea and coffee all provide additional calories. A large (32 ounce) soda typically contains 430 calories and a large (32 ounce) sweetened iced tea contains approximately 400 calories. Limit the high-calorie drinks to special occasions and include more water, low-fat milk and low-calorie drinks.

Use MyPlate (www.choosemyplate.gov) as a tool to decide what foods and how much of each should be on your plate. ‘Get Your Plate in Shape’ and find new ways to make mealtime more healthful and enjoyable.

When you visit the ChooseMyPlate website, click on the link for sample menus and recipes. The sample menus can help you get started with shaping up your plate.

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