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Living Well

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Choose MyPlate

Have you seen the new MyPlate icon? The icon was released in June 2011 by the United States Department of Agriculture. It is based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and its goal is to help consumers make better food choices.

The MyPlate icon also serves as a simple reminder to eat healthfully at mealtimes. The plate helps consumers identify the five basic food groups that they should include when building a healthy plate. For example, the plate is split into four sections – each representing a different food group (protein, grains, fruits, and vegetables). The sections vary in size depending on the recommended portion of food a person should eat, such as making half your plate fruits and vegetables. A circle shape next to the plate represents dairy products, especially milk. Notice at the bottom of the icon, there is a web address – choosemyplate.gov. This website provides consumers with nutrition information, health tips, and interactive tools to track their diet and level of physical activity.

With the release of the MyPlate icon, several consumer messages were also released. These include:

***Enjoy your food, but eat less.** Take time to fully enjoy your food as you eat it. Eating too fast or when your attention is elsewhere may lead to eating too many calories. Pay attention to hunger and fullness cues before, during, and after meals. Use them to recognize when to eat and when you've had enough.

***Avoid oversized portions.** Use a smaller plate, bowl, and glass. Portion out foods before you eat. When eating out, choose a smaller size option, share a dish, or take home part of your meal.

***Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.** Use MyPlate as a visual cue to remember to increase your consumption of fruits and vegetables. Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables so your body gets needed vitamins and nutrients. Add fruits and vegetables to meals as part of main or side dishes or as a dessert.

***Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk.** They have the same amount of calcium and other essential nutrients as whole milk, but fewer calories and less saturated fat.

***Make half your grains whole grains.** To eat more whole grains, substitute a whole-grain product for a refined product—such as eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread or brown rice instead of white rice.

***Compare sodium in foods.** Use the Nutrition Facts label to choose lower sodium versions of foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals. Select canned foods labeled “low sodium,” “reduced sodium,” or “no salt added.”

***Drink water instead of sugary drinks.** Cut calories by drinking water or unsweetened beverages. Soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks are a major source of added sugar, and calories, in American diets.

For more information regarding nutrition, physical activity, or MyPlate, visit choosemyplate.gov. You can also contact the Flint Hills Extension District office in Council Grove at (620) 767-5136 or the office in Cottonwood Falls at (620) 273-6491.