

# US replaces food pyramid with 'healthy plate'

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This undated handout image provided by the Agriculture Department shows the department's new healthy eating symbol: My Plate. The Agriculture Department says its new healthy eating symbol \_ called "My Plate" \_ will show Americans that nutrition doesn't have to be complicated. (AP Photo/Agriculture Department)

The US government on Thursday ditched its two-decade old "pyramid" model for healthy eating and introduced a new plate symbol half-filled

with fruits and vegetables to urge better eating habits.

The colorful design, called MyPlate, was unveiled by First Lady Michelle Obama and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

"Parents don't have the time to measure out exactly three ounces of chicken or to look up how much rice or [broccoli](#) is in a serving," said Michelle Obama, who is a mother of two daughters, Sasha and Malia.

"But we do have time to take a look at our kids' plates. We do it all the time. We usually are the ones fixing the plates," she added.

"And as long as they're eating proper portions, as long as half of their meal is [fruits and vegetables](#) alongside their lean proteins, [whole grains](#) and low-fat dairy, then we're good. It's as simple as that."

The plate icon is sectioned into four parts, with fruits and vegetables making up one half and grains and proteins filling the other half. A dairy drink is included alongside.

"Enjoy your food, but eat less," the US Department of Agriculture said, urging people to "avoid oversized portions," choose fat-free or low-fat milk and "make at least half your grains whole grains."

The graphic replaces the [food pyramid](#), released in 1992, which showed that fats and oils were located at the upper tip and should be used sparingly, while whole grains made up the base of the diet with six to 11 servings daily.

The pyramid design was modified in 2005 to include slices of color and a figure climbing stairs to suggest the importance of exercise, but critics maintained it was too hard for the general public to understand.

"MyPlate is an uncomplicated symbol to help remind people to think about their [food choices](#) in order to lead healthier lifestyles," said Vilsack.

"This effort is about more than just giving information, it is a matter of making people understand there are options and practical ways to apply them to their daily lives."

A total of 26.7 percent of the US population is obese, and no single state has been able to meet the 15 percent obesity limit set by the US government, according to 2009 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A White House task force found last year that close to one third of children in America are overweight or obese, and obesity rates among youths have tripled since 1980.

Obama said the MyPlate icon will be useful in the fight against childhood obesity, but would not be limited to that age group.

"It's an image that can be reinforced and practiced at breakfast, lunch, and at dinner, no matter how old we are," said the first lady, who is also an advocate for childhood exercise with her "Let's Move" program.

"And I've seen this work in my life already. Since I've seen the icon, I can't help but look at my own plate a little differently to see whether I have enough fruits and veggies. And trust me, we are implementing this in our household," she added.

"We've had a conversation about sitting down with Malia and Sasha and helping them think about how to choose their proportions, and this plate is a huge tool."

Early reactions to the new symbol, which will be posted in doctors' offices, schools and on nutritional websites, were largely positive.

"USDA's new [healthy eating](#) graphic is a huge improvement over the inscrutable food pyramid," said the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

"It likely will shock most people into recognizing that they need to eat a heck of a lot more vegetables and fruits. Most people are eating about a quarter of a plate of fruits or vegetables, not a half a plate as recommended."

**More information:** [www.choosemyplate.gov/](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/)

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