

Nutrient-Dense Foods

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Thursday, 16 February 2012 15:59 -

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In 2011 the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans were released. Educators who were using MyPyramid to teach nutrition wondered for weeks if the tools they had been using for several years would change as a result of the new guidelines.

Finally, MyPlate was released. Consumers will begin seeing this new icon in advertisements and on food packages, and educators will begin using it to teach healthy eating, reports Extension Educator Jessye Goertz.

MyPlate guidelines will continue to evolve in the next few months as this new concept is tailored to the needs of all consumers. (For more information about MyPlate, see www.choosemyplate.gov.)

Regardless of the tools that are used to teach nutrition, some things never change. In order to stay healthy, we need nutrients that are available in the food we eat.

To stay at a healthy weight, we need to balance calories in with calories burned. Because of these two principals, we need to choose nutrient-dense foods because they contain the nutrients we need with relatively fewer calories than other choices in the same food group.

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Enjoy nutrient-dense foods as the foundation of a healthy diet. Nutrient-dense foods give you the most vitamins, minerals and other nutrients for the fewest calories. Build your daily eating plan on a variety of nutrient-dense foods first.

Choose

- brightly colored fruits and 100% fruit juices
- vibrant colored vegetables
- whole grain foods
- fat free or low-fat milk, cheese and yogurt
- lean protein foods which include meats, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts

Here are some examples of foods that are high in calories and/or solid fat and the nutrient-dense alternative. This list gives sample ideas, but is not a complete list.

By choosing the nutrient-dense foods you will consume more vitamins and minerals for the number of calories you are consuming:

Instead of sweetened fruit yogurt, choose plain fat-free yogurt with fresh fruit.

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Instead of whole milk, choose low fat or fat-free milk.

Instead of beef chuck, choose beef loin or round.

Instead of regular hot dogs and cheese, choose low fat hot dogs and cheese.

Instead of sweetened breakfast cereals, choose unsweetened cereals with fresh fruit.

Instead of apple pie, choose an apple.

Instead of French fries, choose a baked potato (without butter and sour cream).

Instead of sweetened tea or soda, choose unsweetened tea or water.

Instead of candy, cookies or cake, choose fresh or dried fruit.

So, while the tools educators use to teach nutrition and the icons manufacturers use on their packages may change, our need for nutrients and our need to balance calories in with calories burned does not change.

For more information on MyPlate go to food.unl.edu for the online slide show Choose MyPlate: Selected Consumer Messages. UNL Extension is committed to helping Nebraskans know how—and know now.