

The Healthy Eating Plate

Main objectives: To introduce the concept of The Health Eating Plate developed by the Harvard School of Public Health, which can be found at: <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate/>. To explain how to use The Healthy Eating Plate to compose a healthy meal. To explain the difference between a portion size and a serving size, show how Americans generally eat larger portions than recommended or necessary, and demonstrate how different plates and bowls tend to cause us to eat more food than we think we are eating.

Essential Discussion Topics:

- *Pyramid or plate?* Ask students if they have ever heard of the food pyramid? Briefly discuss what the food pyramid is and what it included. Ask the students if they have ever heard of the Healthy Eating Plate? Discuss how this has largely replaced the pyramid because it is easier to think about and use in everyday life. Explain that the plate breaks up food groups into meals (on a plate) rather than giving suggested amounts of each good group over the course of an entire day. Ideally, have a large poster size version to refer to during the discussion. (Could pass out paper plates to students so that they can draw and label their own plate throughout the discussion.) Explain to students that they should think of this lesson as a sort of review of many of the lessons that they've had before.
- *The Healthy Eating Plate.* Pass out paper (or paper plates could be fun) to let students draw their own healthy eating plate while you discuss it. Introduce the general concept: ½ fruits and vegetables, ¼ protein, ¼ grains. Ideally, this is what your plate should look like for every meal, not just dinner! It is important to get a balance of food groups throughout the day. Then talk about each category briefly – start by asking students what they remember from prior lessons about each food group. Some things to definitely highlight:
 - **Fruits and Veggies:** Eat the rainbow! Try to eat a wide variety of colors in order to get all of the different vitamins and minerals that your body needs.
 - **Protein:** Choose lean meats (such a white meat chicken, turkey) that are baked or sautéed rather than fried. Try to limit the amount of red meat. Remember that you can also get protein from plant sources – like beans, nuts, etc.
 - **Grains:** Aim for whole grains. Look for the words “whole grain” on food labels and, in general, tend toward brown rather than white (i.e. brown pasta, rice, etc.)

Supplemental Discussion Topics:

- *Serving Size vs. Portion Size.*
 - Serving sizes: The amount listed on nutrition labels as one serving. There is a future lesson on reading nutrition labels that will cover this topic in more depth. Today, the focus is more on what we actually see on our plates/serve ourselves, rather than get into a discussion about food labels.
 - Portion Size: In contrast, portion sizes are the amounts we actually put on our plates and eat during a meal. That may mean multiple servings. This goal of presenting this point is, clearly, not to imply that kids should be eating only what's listed as a serving, but rather to be conscious of the fact that portion sizes

in America have been increasing dramatically. Questions to ask: Why do you think portions are getting bigger? What does it do for our health?

Activities:

- *Guess the portion size.* Bring in everyday objects such as a baseball, light bulb, golf ball, deck of cards. List various types of food (i.e. slice of bread, ice cream, chicken, peanut butter) and have the students guess which of the objects equals the correct portion size for that food item. Print out this useful handout as a guide/answer key:
http://img.webmd.com/dtmcms/live/webmd/consumer_assets/site_images/media/pdf/diet/portion-control-guide.pdf.

Food Activities:

- *Pouring your morning cereal.* Have two large cereal bowls. Ask for two different volunteers to take a box of cereal and pour out how much they would actually serve themselves at a single meal. Usually, kids will pour a lot more than a single serving into a bowl (as, I'm sure, almost everyone does). We will then compare the amount they pour out to what is considered a serving – likely around a single cup. The goal of the activity is to show that, while we don't ever really eat as little as a single serving, we often eat way more in a portion than our bodies need.
- *The size of your cup, bowl or plate.* Have 3 different sized bowls set up at the front of class (one small, medium and large). Pour an equivalent amount of cereal into each bowl. Place a number in front of each bowl. Have the kids form a line and walk by and then vote for which bowl they think contains the greatest amount of food. Bowl sizes can confuse people into thinking they are eating less than they actually are. A large bowl will make the same amount of food appear to be much less. Hopefully, the majority of kids will think the small bowl contains the most food. The point of this activity is to show kids that, by using a really large bowl or plate for their meals, they may be portioning out way more food than they really need to eat. Likewise, eating out of a bag or box often leads to eating much more than we think we are eating. Try to avoid focusing too much on the amount of food we should eat and instead direct the discussion towards the importance of conscious eating and listening to our bodies to tell us how much it needs.

Snack Ideas:

- *Make Your Own Bowl of Cereal.* Let the students measure out the proper serving size of cereal (something simple and healthy like Cheerios). Have fruit for topping (sliced bananas, sliced strawberries, or blueberries). For milk, could bring in soymilk or almond milk in addition to cows milk (skim!) to give the students an opportunity to try something new.