

The Eating Rules Guide to the "My Plate" Icon

As part of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines, the "My Plate" icon is intended to remind Americans to eat healthfully. This guide should help you find good choices in each of the "five food groups." My recommendations for each group are based on the USDA's, but I've made some small changes. For the full USDA guidelines, visit www.ChooseMyPlate.gov.

Fruits.

Any fresh, whole fruit counts as part of the Fruit Group. Fruits may be fresh, frozen, or dried, and may be whole, cut-up, or puréed. It's better to do the cutting or pureeing yourself, as fruits start to lose some nutritional value as soon as they've been cut.

I disagree with the USDA's inclusion of 100% fruit juice – it's not a whole food, and can have as much sugar as soda.

Stick to whole, fresh fruits whenever possible.

Fruit is Fun: Apples*, apricots, avocados**, bananas, blackberries, blueberries*, boysenberries, cherries, figs, grapefruit, grapes*, guava, kiwi, lemons, limes, mangoes, melons, nectarines*, oranges, papaya, peaches*, pears, persimmons, pineapple, plums, prunes, raisins, raspberries, strawberries*, tangerines, tomatoes**.

Vegetables.

Any vegetable – but not vegetable juice, in my opinion – counts as a member of the Vegetable Group. Vegetables may be raw or cooked; fresh (always preferred), frozen, canned (watch the sodium), or dried/dehydrated; and may be whole, cut-up, or mashed. Best to do the cutting or mashing yourself, from fresh vegetables.

Eat the rainbow!

Dark Green: Bok choy, broccoli, collard greens*, dark green leafy lettuce, kale*, mesclun, mustard greens, romaine lettuce, spinach*, turnip greens, watercress.

Red & Orange: Acorn squash, butternut squash, carrots, hubbard squash, pumpkin, red & orange peppers*, sweet potatoes (with skin, not fried).

Beans and Peas: Black beans, black-eyed peas (mature, dry), garbanzo beans (chickpeas), kidney beans, lentils, navy beans, pinto beans, soy beans (edamame), split peas, white beans.

Starchy: Corn, fresh cowpeas, field peas, black-eyed peas (not dry), green bananas, green peas, green lima beans, plantains, potatoes* (with skin, not fried), water chestnuts.

Other: Artichokes, asparagus, bean sprouts, beets, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, celery*, cucumbers, eggplant, green beans, green peppers, mushrooms, okra, onions, parsnips, turnips, wax beans, zucchini.

Grains.

Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley or another cereal grain is a grain product. **Try to make all of your grains whole** (the USDA suggests only half.) Better yet: Eat half your grains as whole, cooked kernels such as bulgar, quinoa, farro, or brown rice. Eat the other half in whole grain flours (such as in 100% whole wheat bread).

Whole-some: Amaranth, barley, brown rice, buckwheat, bulgur, cornmeal, emmer wheat, farro, millet, oatmeal & rolled oats, popcorn (not from a greasy microwave bag or movie theater), quinoa, rye, sorghum, spelt, teff, triticale, wheat.

Dairy.

The USDA says all fluid milk products and many foods made from milk are considered part of this food group. Foods made from milk that retain their calcium content are part of the group. Foods made from milk that have little to no calcium, such as cream cheese, cream, and butter, are not. Calcium-fortified soy milk (soy beverage) is also part of the Dairy Group.

I Say: Okay, fine. But **dairy should simply be included in the Protein group.** Choose hormone-free, antibiotic-free, and organic whenever possible. Desserts (including chocolate milk), are extravagances.

Protein(s).

The USDA Says all foods made from meat, poultry, seafood, beans and peas, eggs, processed soy products, nuts, and seeds are considered part of the Protein Foods Group. Beans and peas are also part of the Vegetable Group.

Select a variety of protein foods to improve nutrient intake and health benefits, including at least 8

ounces of cooked seafood per week. Young children may need less. Vegetarian options in the Protein Foods Group include beans and peas, processed soy products, and nuts and seeds. Meat and poultry choices should be lean or low-fat.

I'd like to add: Protein is a nutrient, not a food group, and it should be "proteins" (plural) – to help indicate that a wide variety of foods (not just meat) fit easily into this group. Most Americans get about twice the protein they need – and almost all foods in the other groups contain protein.

Beans & Peas: Black beans, black-eyed peas (mature, dry), garbanzo beans (chickpeas), kidney beans, lentils, navy beans, pinto beans, soy beans (edamame), split peas, white beans.

Nuts, Nut Butters, & Seeds: Almonds, cashews, flaxseed, hazelnuts (filberts), peanuts, pecans, pistachios, pumpkin seeds, macadamia nuts, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, walnuts. Nuts and seeds are calorie-dense, so stick to ¼ cup serving sizes – or 2 tbsp. (about the size of a golf ball) for the butters.

Eggs: Chicken, duck and sure, what the heck, ostrich.

Fish: Anchovies, catfish, cod, flounder, haddock, halibut, herring, mackerel, pollack, salmon (wild!), sardines, trout, tuna. Avoid swordfish and shark due to high mercury content.

Shellfish: Clams, crabs, crayfish, lobster, mussels, octopus, oysters, scallops, squid (calamari), shrimp (avoid imported farmed).

Lean cuts of: Beef, lamb, pork, bison, rabbit, venison, chicken, duck, goose, turkey. Choose grass-fed, pastured, hormone-free, antibiotic-free and/or organic whenever possible.

Low-Fat and Low-Sugar Dairy: Cow, Sheep, or Goat Milk; Milk Alternatives (Soy, Rice, Almond); Cheese (small servings!); Yogurt. Choose organic whenever possible.

