

Rethink Your Plate



By Amie Louwers, RD, LD, CD

The simplicity of following the “Plate Method” comes from replacing your usual high-fat, high-calorie foods with more nutritious options, such as colorful fruits, vegetables, green salads, beans, whole grains, nuts, low-fat dairy and lean meats such as fish and white meat poultry.

How the Plate Method Works

The usual American dinner plate is typically distributed with the meat or main entrée covering half the plate and starches filling the other half. Sometimes, a lucky vegetable makes its way onto the plate. With this typical meat and potatoes dinner, it is far too high in fat, sugar, refined carbohydrates and ultimately, calories.

Instead, using the Plate Method, cover one-half of your plate with non-starchy vegetables (vegetables other than corn, peas or potatoes), one-quarter of your plate with lean protein (chicken or turkey breast, fish, low-fat dairy), and one-quarter of your plate with fruit or whole grains/starches (brown rice, whole wheat pasta, whole wheat couscous, barley, beans, whole grain bread or potatoes).

By filling your plate with more fruit, vegetables and grains, you can help prevent chronic disease such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease. You can also lose weight because you will feel full on fewer calories and all while gaining the benefits from the more plant-based diet.

What if, instead of focusing on calories, you could improve your health and lose weight by simply changing what your plate looks like at mealtimes?

Sound simple? It is!

Rethinking How You Eat

Once your food is re-distributed on your plate, the next step is to rethink how you eat. Start with your vegetables. Most of the time, you concentrate on the meat and starchy side dishes. If you are still hungry after finishing those, you go back for more – not having touched the vegetable still sitting there. Instead, eat your vegetables first! This way, you are calming your hunger with high-fiber, low-calorie foods, which fill you up and sustain you. Once you finish your vegetables, move on to the whole-grains or main entrée.

Here’s another trick you can try. If you start and end your meal with vegetables, you will be less likely to go back for seconds on the higher calorie items. The last bite of food that you put into your mouth is the trigger for what foods in which you go back for seconds. If you end with macaroni and cheese, this is what you may likely re-fill your plate

with. However, if you start with a hot vegetable and end with a salad, the salad provides a neutral taste and negates your impulse to head back to the kitchen. Besides, who really gets excited for going back for seconds on salad?

If you normally enjoy a dessert following a meal, try replacing it with fresh fruit. Interestingly, the sweet fruit does calm our taste buds for the sweet dessert.

A general guideline for the entire Plate Method concept is to make fruits and vegetables about half of what you eat, and every time you eat.

The Plate Method Works Wherever You Go

Following the Plate Method is an easy way to ensure you stay on track whether eating at home, at a restaurant, on vacation, or at a friend’s house. You can take the principles of it anywhere. The Plate Method is also something that the entire family can follow and is appropriate for anyone interested in weight-loss, as well as preventing heart disease, diabetes or cancer.

About the Author:

Amie Louwers, RD, LD, CD, is a Registered Dietitian at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC. She specializes in adult weight management, cardiovascular health, diabetes and post-operative bariatric surgery counseling and education. Her passion is in empowering patients to meet their health and weight-loss goals which will improve their quality of life and self-confidence.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
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 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
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