

Hello everyone, and welcome to the Fresh Focus Podcast, a Podcast where we give you bite sized food and nutrition tips to chew on in between office visits. I'm Beth, one of your Marion VA healthcare system Dietitian Nutritionists. I want to start off the podcast by recognizing the empty chair. Here within the Marion VA healthcare system we always start every meeting acknowledging an empty chair in the room to remind us each and every day that we not only serve Veterans that walk through our doors but the ones that are no longer here to speak their voice.

As Dietitians with the VA, our job is to help take the mystery out of good nutrition habits. We want to make it as simple as possible for you to make the healthy choices you need to reach your nutrition and lifestyle goals. And it's with that goal in mind that we are going to be taking a deep dive into a personal meal planning tool called the Healthy Plate. While the Healthy Plate system is both effective and easy to understand, we are going to be breaking our discussion into a 6 part series in order to make it more....wait for it...digestible.

However, before we move forward to looking at the Healthy Plate, what it is and how it works, first we need to go back – I mean way back – for some of us like way way back. Your sitting in your 7th grade health class, it's the last period of the day, and you can't wait to leave and go pick up the new Creedence Clearwater Revival Record....or VanHalen cassette... or Backstreet Boys CD... insert your decade here (I won't tell anybody...). So anyway, your sitting there and your teacher is droning on and on and on about something called the Food Guide Pyramid, or the food wheel, or something similar depending on your decade.. "Ya, I get it, Grains and Breads at the bottom, eat more of those and less of the tasty sugary things at the top of the pyramid. Eat a balanced diet" Simple enough right?.... Or is it?

I'm sure we all remember the food pyramid. Originally released by the USDA in 1992, it was a visual guide that was supposed to illustrate what a proper, balanced diet would look like. The base of your diet should be mostly grains and starchy vegetables, followed by fruits and veggies, meat and dairy, etc. While this guide is very valuable in illustrating a macro level, 30,000 foot view of what a healthy person's diet should look like, where it falls short is in helping you figure out what to eat for lunch today, or what to fix my family for dinner tomorrow night.

The Food guide pyramid also had numerous flaws that we could dive deeper into but we want to keep it simple today and stay focused so I'll just say that including its many flaws it was very hard to read and definitely not user friendly.

Like you all, when I think about eating, I do NOT Think about pyramids. I think about the plate my food goes on and yes, ideally we would all take the time to plot out every meal we or our families will eat for the next two weeks, and make sure that we have the exact right number of servings from each category. But we should all probably also make our beds everyone morning and floss twice a day – but nobody is 100% perfect, right?? besides we don't expect perfection!

Enter, the healthy plate. Put very simply, the healthy plate is a visual guide that shows what types of foods, and how much of each type, you should eat at each meal, using the space on a standard 9-inch dinner plate as our guide. You separate each circular plate into four equal quadrants, like four pieces of a pie (just kidding, I'm not recommending you eat pie). So at each meal, all you really need to do is focus on filling half of your plate, or two of those four quadrants, with non starchy vegetables. Then quadrant four you will want to fill with grains, beans, or starchy vegetables, and quadrant four with minimally processed meats or other proteins. And that's it.

For example if you plan to have porkchops for tonight's meal, that would be your protein source, so you would have a 4-6 oz baked porkchop, add a ½ baked potato for a starch/carbohydrate section, add some cooked broccoli or mixed veggies (frozen or fresh) or both to fill ½ your plate or add one of those veggies and add a salad to complete the healthy plate model.

If you happen to be sitting there with your plate in front of you with only meat and potatoes, don't get discouraged, that's what we Dietitians can help you with... take a quick moment and ask yourself, how can I start today to adapt to this healthy plate model?

Do you happen to have green beans you could have added to tonight's meal? Or maybe even decreasing your portion of potatoes and adding in diced onions and peppers.

Or are you looking down at your plate and noticing it is the largest plate you have in your cabinet??

In our MOVE program here at the VA we teach our veterans to utilize a 9 inch plate. So that could be your goal for the next meal to use a smaller plate.

I want you to think of one or two small goals you could start with today to incorporate this healthy plate model into your daily routine. So one small step into that direction would be using a smaller plate if you typically eat off a 12-inch plate.

Or another small step would be to add a vegetable to your next meal

Another small step could be to listen to our podcasts to learn more.

We want to review these simple guidelines that you can plan a meal that you can be confident will move you one step closer to your fitness and nutrition goals.

Remember, it takes about 21 days to create a new habit, so please join us in this six-part podcast series and let us help you with meal planning. The next episodes will further explain the Healthy plate sections in more detail.

The Marion VA Healthcare System's dietitians are available to help our veterans, we are just a phone call away. If you would like to reach out for individual needs please give your primary care clinic a call and just ask to speak to your Dietitian.

Thank you all for joining us today as we take a fresh focus on keeping meal planning made simple. Stay tuned for more episodes!!