

How can you follow the Healthy Eating Plate? Here's a rundown, section by section:

Fill half of your plate with vegetables and fruits. The more color, and the more variety on this part of the plate, the better. Potatoes and French fries don't count as vegetables on the Healthy Eating Plate, because they are high in fast-digested starch (carbohydrate), which has the same roller-coaster effect on blood sugar and insulin as white bread and sweets. These surges, in the short term, can lead to hunger and overeating, and in the long term, can lead to weight gain, type 2 diabetes, and other health problems.

Save a quarter of your plate for whole grains—not just any grains: Whole grains—whole wheat, brown rice, and foods made with them, such as whole wheat pasta—have a gentler effect on blood sugar and insulin than white bread, white rice, and other so-called “refined grains.” That's why the Healthy Eating Plate says to choose whole grains—the less processed, the better—and limit refined grains.

Put a healthy source of protein on one quarter of your plate: Choose fish, chicken, beans or nuts, since these contain beneficial nutrients, such as the heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids in fish, and the fiber in beans. An egg a day is okay for most people, too (people with diabetes should limit their egg intake to three yolks a week, but egg whites are fine). Limit red meat—beef, pork, and lamb—and avoid processed meats—bacon, cold cuts, hot dogs, and the like—since over time, regularly eating even small amounts of these foods raises the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and colon cancer.

Drink water, coffee or tea. On the Healthy Eating Plate, complete your meal with a glass of water, or if you like, a cup of tea or coffee (with little or no sugar). Limit milk and dairy products to one to two servings per day, since high intakes are associated with increased risk of prostate cancer and possibly ovarian cancer. Limit juice to a small glass per day, since it is as high in sugar as a sugary soda. Skip the sugary drinks, since they provide lots of calories and virtually no other nutrients. And over time, routinely drinking sugary drinks can lead to weight gain, increase the risk of type 2 diabetes, and possibly increase the risk of heart disease. Read more about healthy drinks, or read more about calcium, milk, and health.