MyPlate for preschoolers –
A helpful nutrition resource for caregivers

Based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, USDA established MyPlate as the nutrition icon to remind Americans to eat healthfully and to make better food choices. It uses the familiar image of a place setting to show proper proportioning of the five basic food groups as they would fit into a daily meal plan.

There are three key messages that are the focus of MyPlate.

1. Balancing calories
   • Enjoy your food, but eat less.
   • Avoid oversized portions.

2. Foods to increase
   • Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
   • Make at least half your grains whole grains.
   • Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk.

3. Foods to reduce
   • Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals by reading the labels and choose foods with lower numbers.
   • Drink water instead of sugary drinks.

ChooseMyPlate.gov

The ChooseMyPlate.gov website has a variety of resources available for educators, health care professionals, parents and children. There is an entire section for preschoolers at ChooseMyPlate.gov/preschoolers.html that covers important topics such as:

- Developing healthy eating habits
- Growth during the preschool years
- Picky eating
- Physical activity
- Food safety
- Meal and snack patterns and ideas

Under the Printable Materials & Ordering tab, there is a “10 Tips Nutrition Education Series” that is available in both English and Spanish and can be printed in color or black and white. These make excellent parent handouts.

Customized information

The SuperTracker feature allows you to plan, analyze and track diet and physical activity for adults and children. Parents and caregivers can create a profile for children to get customized, sample daily eating plans, which serve as a guide for what and how much to offer from each food group. It also enables goal setting and contains a “Food-a-pedia” with nutrition information for over 8,000 foods. Tips and support are available to encourage planning ahead and making healthier choices.

extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare
Physical activity is important, too!

Although the MyPlate icon visually represents healthy food choices, physical activity is also an important part of a healthy lifestyle and there is plenty of information on the ChooseMyPlate.gov site about this. Emphasis is placed on moderate and vigorous activity and examples are listed on the website.

Getting enough physical activity has many benefits. It can help you and the children:

• Increase chances of living longer
• Feel better about yourself
• Decrease chances of becoming depressed
• Sleep well at night
• Move around more easily
• Have stronger muscles and bones
• Stay at or get to a healthy weight
• Be with friends or meet new people
• Enjoy yourself and have fun

How much activity a person needs depends on his age. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics in Preventing Childhood Obesity in Early Care and Education Programs, physical activity recommendations for children are:

• Infants should have tummy time everyday when they are awake and should be taken outside 2-3 times per day.
• Toddlers (12 months to 3 years) should be allowed 60-90 minutes daily of vigorous play including running during an eight hour day.
• Preschoolers should be allowed 90-120 minutes of vigorous activity per eight hour day.
• School-age children should get 60 minutes or more daily of moderate or vigorous physical play including muscle-strengthening activities (ex. climbing) and bone-building activities (ex. running).

Adults need a total of two hours and thirty minutes a week of moderate activity, or one hour and fifteen minutes of vigorous activity, best spread out over several days.

There is even greater benefit to being more active. Even ten-minute bouts can add up over the course of a week.

When choosing physical activities for children, the most important thing is to keep it fun. Make sure that most children can be active most of the time during the activity, so avoid activities such as “Duck, duck, goose” or traditional dodge ball that only allow a few children to be active at a time. Flag football with socks is a fun way to get children moving. Adapt the rules so that when a child’s sock is grabbed, she can pick up another that has been dropped and is not considered out of the game, to keep everyone having fun and using lots of energy. Educators can also think of ways in circle time to get children moving like jumping up and down while counting. Putting on music and getting everyone up and dancing is easy and fun as well.

To find how many calories an activity will burn and tips for increasing physical activity, access the website at http://www.choosemyplate.gov/physical-activity.html