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For Immediate Release

Get Your Plate in Shape

March is National Nutrition Month and the Union County Health Department reminds you to "Get Your Plate in Shape".

"Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean meats and low-fat dairy products are full of the nutrients we need to stay healthy," says Mani Syar, licensed dietitian for the Union County Health Department. "Make sure to put an emphasis on portion control and eating foods from all the food groups. USDA's *MyPlate* is a great tool to help you accomplish a balanced eating plan."

Syar offers the following recommendations to "Get Your Plate in Shape":

Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.

- Eat a variety of vegetables, especially dark-green, red and orange varieties, as well as beans and peas.
- When buying canned vegetables, choose "reduced sodium" or "no salt added" whenever possible. Rinsing whole varieties like beans, corn and peas can also reduce sodium levels.
- Dried and frozen fruits and those canned in water or their own juice are good options when fresh varieties are not available.
- Make sure every meal and snack has at least one fruit or vegetable or both.

Make at least half your grains whole.

- Choose brown rice, barley and oats and other whole grains for your sides and ingredients.
- Switch to 100-percent whole-grain breads, cereals and crackers.
- Check the ingredients list on food packages to find foods that are made with whole grains.

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Switch to fat-free or low-fat milk.

- Fat-free and low-fat milk have the same amount of calcium and other essential nutrients as whole milk, but less fat and fewer calories.
- If you are lactose intolerant, try lactose-free milk or a calcium-fortified soy beverage.

Vary your protein choices.

- Eat a variety of foods each week from the protein food group like seafood, nuts and beans, as well as lean meat, poultry and eggs.
- Eat more plant-based proteins such as nuts, beans, whole grains and whole soy foods like tofu and edamame.
- At least twice a week, make fish and seafood the protein on your plate.
- Keep meat and poultry portions lean and limit to three ounces per meal.

Cut back on sodium and empty calories from solid fats and added sugars.

- Drink water instead of sugary drinks like regular sodas, fruit-flavored drinks and sweetened teas and coffees. Choose 100-percent fruit juice.
- Compare sodium in foods and choose those with the least amount listed on the Nutrition Facts Panel.
- Season foods with spices or herbs instead of salt.
- Select lean cuts of meat or poultry and fat-free or low-fat dairy products.
- Use heart-healthy oils like olive, canola and sunflower oil in place of butter or shortening when cooking.
- Cook more often at home where you are in control of what is in your food.

"And always try to incorporate exercise into your day," Syar adds. "Choose things you enjoy doing such as walking with a friend, joining a sports league, dancing or simply playing outside with your children. Even if you can only steal 10 minutes here and there each day, you'll reap the benefits of physical activity."

For helpful tips, recipes, fun games, promotional tools and nutrition education resources, visit www.eatright.org/nnm/ or contact the Union County Health Department at 937-642-2053.

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