

I Think the Change Just Sphinx

By Reg P. Wydeven
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A couple of years ago, I wrote about how the pillars of my elementary education were casually tossed out. First, in 2006 the International Astronomical Union decided that Pluto was no longer a planet. Then the British government revoked the spelling mantra that generations of schoolchildren have learned: “i before e, except after c.” Citing too many exceptions to the rule, like ‘veil’ and ‘their,’ teachers were advised not to use it when instructing students.

Next schools stopped teaching how to write in cursive. Because of the saturation of electronic media such as email and texting, cursive writing has become an endangered species. While my dad always said that had I gone to Catholic school I would never have received any holy cards for my penmanship, I still had to learn it. My kids probably won’t, however.

They also won’t have to worry about the food pyramid.

As a kid, we learned about proper nutrition from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s food pyramid. The geometric shape taught us about the good foundation for healthy eating. The concept was simple: the worst food was at the base of the pyramid, representing the stuff you should eat the most of, namely fruits and vegetables; the good stuff, like cheeseburgers and cake, was at the tip of the pyramid, meaning that’s what you should eat the least.

Apparently this concept is too tricky for today’s youth. That’s why the USDA introduced ‘MyPlate’, the new symbol that nutrition experts believe is the perfect geometry to represent what we should eat — a plate.

MyPlate is very simple: it’s essentially a pie chart that looks like a picture of a plate with multi-colored wedges on it representing the various food groups. The USDA recommends that the meal on our actual plate mirrors the portions on MyPlate.

For example, the green wedge, which represents vegetables, is about a 30% slice, meaning 30% of our meal should be veggies. The red slice is for fruits, and is about a 20% slice. Brown is for grains, and is also about a 30% slice. The last 20% is represented by an indigo wedge for proteins like fish, meat, eggs and nuts. In addition, there is a smaller blue circle next to the plate that represents dairy. The circle looks like a drinking glass and is symbolic for a cup of milk or a serving of cheese. Cake is unrepresented.

The food group proportions are a very general guideline: every person has different nutritional needs, based on age, health and other factors. Accordingly, the USDA advises following its new set of dietary guidelines that were released in January.

First Lady Michelle Obama helped unveil the new MyPlate and is using it in her fight against childhood obesity. She explained that MyPlate is “simple enough for children to understand, even at the elementary school level. They can learn to use this tool now and use it for the rest of their lives.” Experts agree, claiming the new symbol is easier to comprehend and gives Americans a visual cue as to how to eat a balanced meal.

In addition to MyPlate, the USDA is also hoping to appeal to young Americans by using social media. For example, the Department will post nutritional advice every day on Twitter. Officials have also come up with a snazzy website, www.choosemyplate.gov, to explain the nutritional guide and feature interactive tools to help people manage their weight and track exercise as well.

So check out the new MyPlate and you’ll see that balanced nutrition is as easy as pie. Just don’t eat any.

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