



NEWS RELEASE

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 1034, Alexandria, VA 22302

John Webster (703) 305-7600



USDA RELEASES NEW MENU PLANNER TO HELP PUBLIC BUILD BETTER DIETS

WASHINGTON, Mar. 11, 2008 -- Most people have little idea whether they're eating a balanced diet or not. The USDA wants to change that. Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the release of the *MyPyramid Menu Planner*, a new state-of-the-art, on-line nutrition guidance tool to help individuals and homemakers plan healthier menus based on the recommendations of the MyPyramid food guidance system and the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

According to Dr. Brian Wansink, Executive Director of the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP), the new *MyPyramid Menu Planner* is the latest in a series of on-line nutrition tools developed by CNPP. The *Planner* is provided free of charge to the public and can help motivate consumers to make healthier food choices. According to Wansink, "It has three benefits. Based on the information you provide, it interactively shows whether your diet is balanced and allows you to track it. It gives you an easy way to know whether you are losing or gaining weight based on what you plan to eat. And it helps you plan upcoming meals."

To use the *Planner*, go to www.MyPyramid.gov and click on the *MyPyramid Menu Planner* link.

The *Menu Planner* will be useful to not only those interested in healthful and nutritious diets, but also high school and middle school classes, and dietitians, health professionals, and nutrition educators for use in counseling and educational programming.

After a person enters his or her age, sex, height, weight and physical activity level, they can begin entering food items and amounts they might consume each day. The screen displays visual feedback as each item is added. From this, various reports can be seen and printed which include a daily, weekly or family menu, a breakdown by food item, and goal setting worksheets.

###

A case study of Jill Super Mom follows.

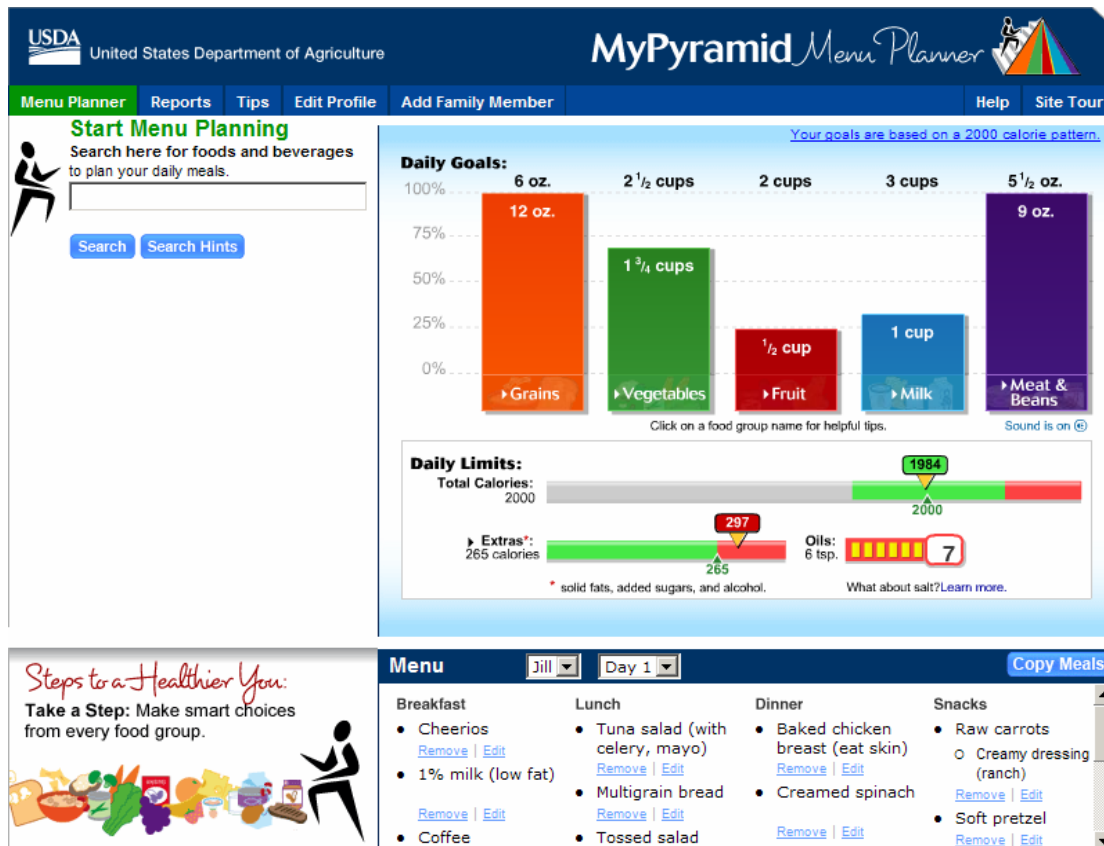
Note to Editor: The following is a hypothetical story on how one woman learned to improve her diet using the *MyPyramid Menu Planner*. Scroll down to see the story of Jill Super Mom.

We All Know How to Eat a Balanced Diet, Don't We? A Case Study of Jill Super Mom

Jill Super Mom is who many women aspire to be; well read, up to date on the latest trends and fashions, a professional who goes to the gym faithfully, a wife and mom who tries to do her best for her health as well as her family's. Everything she does, she seems to do right. But does she really?

Jill is confident that she knows how to plan a healthy diet. For breakfast—she passes by the cinnamon bun and chooses cereal with lowfat milk. For a mid-day snack, she grabs some baby carrots and a handful of almonds instead of chips or cookies. And at dinner, she goes for a fruit salad instead of ice cream for dessert. Jill thinks she has chosen a healthy, well balanced diet. But did she?

By entering her food choices into the new *MyPyramid Menu Planner*, Jill was surprised to learn that her diet was not as balanced as she had thought.



While Jill’s calorie intake was right on target, she was woefully short on foods from the fruit and milk groups—and foods from the grains and meat&beans groups were way over the top.

What Jill was missing is balance, and the *Menu Planner* is exactly the right tool to help her re-balance her diet and that of her family’s. As Jill enters her food choices, the *Menu Planner* provides instant feedback. With each entry Jill sees the bars on the graph move to reflect each choice. In addition, the *Menu Planner* will suggest ways she can increase her intake of fruits, vegetables, and milk products and show where she can cut back on the grain and meat&beans groups.

Then Jill clicked on “My Next Steps” on the reports menu and decided to work on increasing her fruit intake. She saw the following screen, and chose a couple of items to include next week. She also entered an idea of her own to have a larger fruit portion for dessert. The *Menu Planner* will let Jill track how often she makes each of these changes for the next week.

The screenshot shows the 'MyPyramid Menu Planner' interface. At the top, the USDA logo and 'United States Department of Agriculture' are on the left, and the 'MyPyramid Menu Planner' logo is on the right. A navigation bar includes 'Menu Planner', 'Reports' (highlighted), 'Tips', 'Edit Profile', 'Add Family Member', 'Help', and 'Site Tour'. The main heading is 'Reports: My Next Steps' with a link '(Learn how this works)'. Below this, there are dropdown menus for 'My Next steps' and 'Jill'. The page title is 'My Next Steps: For Jill'. There are three steps: 'Step 1', 'Step 2' (highlighted), and 'Step 3'. The content for Step 2 reads: 'Step 2: You chose to increase fruit as your next step. Here are some ideas for increasing fruit. Pick one or more ideas from the list below, or write in your own.' It lists several suggestions with checkboxes: 'Eat more fruits by snacking on an apple, banana, or strawberries', 'Add a fruit to your breakfast. Top your cereal with bananas or peaches.', 'For dessert, have baked apples, pears or a refreshing fruit salad.', 'At lunch, pack a tangerine, banana, or grapes to eat.', 'At lunch, choose fruit from the salad bar.', 'Add fruit to your kebob. Grilled pineapple or peaches are delicious.', 'Try meat dishes that incorporate fruit, such as chicken with apricots or fruit salsa.', 'Keep a bowl of whole fruit on the table, counter, or in the refrigerator.', 'Refrigerate cut-up fruit for a quick and easy snack.', 'Select fruits with more potassium, such as bananas, prunes, dried apricots, cantaloupe, honeydew melon, and orange juice.', and 'have a larger fruit portion for dessert' (checked and entered in a text box). At the bottom, it says 'Press "Next" to save these ideas, so that you can track your progress.' A decorative footer bar contains icons for various food groups like grains, vegetables, fruits, and dairy.

Jill also noticed that her grains and meat&beans intake was very high. To see where she could cut back, she went to the “Food Details” report page. She saw that the large soft

pretzel she ate counted for 6 ½ ounces of grains! Jill also saw that her portion of chicken at dinner was larger than she needed.

The screenshot shows the MyPyramid Menu Planner interface. At the top, it features the USDA logo and the text "United States Department of Agriculture". The main title is "MyPyramid Menu Planner". Below the title, there are navigation tabs: "Menu Planner", "Reports", "Tips", "Edit Profile", "Add Family Member", "Help", and "Site Tour".

The "Start Menu Planning" section includes a search bar with the text "Enter a food, then click search" and two buttons: "Search" and "Search Hints".

The "Daily Goals" section displays five food groups with their respective goals and current status:

- Grains:** 6 oz. goal, 6 oz. current.
- Vegetables:** 2 ½ cups goal, 1 ¾ cups current.
- Fruit:** 2 cups goal, 2 cups current.
- Milk:** 3 cups goal, 2 cups current.
- Meat & Beans:** 5 ½ oz. goal, 7 oz. current.

The "Daily Limits" section shows:

- Total Calories:** 2000 goal, 1791 current.
- Extras*:** 265 calories goal, 286 current.
- Oils:** 6 tsp goal, 6 current.

At the bottom, the "Menu" section is displayed for "Jill" on "Day 2". It lists meals for Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, and Snacks, each with a list of items and "Remove" or "Edit" links.

With a few changes—Jill’s day is much more balanced.

The *MyPyramid Menu Planner* helps consumers instantly see the results of their choices—in living color.

Jill’s Menu Make-Over follows.

Jill's Menu: Before and After she fine-tuned her diet using *MyPyramid Menu Planner*

BEFORE	AFTER
Breakfast	Breakfast
1 ½ cups cheerios	1 ½ cups cheerios topped with 1 banana
¾ cup lowfat milk	¾ cup lowfat milk
1 slice whole wheat bread with jelly and tub margarine	1 slice whole wheat bread with jelly and tub margarine
Lunch	Lunch
Tuna salad sandwich	Tuna salad sandwich
1 cup tossed salad with low calorie dressing	1 cup tossed salad with low calorie dressing
Diet soda	Diet soda
	1 orange
Dinner	Dinner
5 ounces baked chicken breast	3 ounces baked chicken breast
½ cup creamed spinach	½ cup creamed spinach
½ cup cornbread stuffing	½ cup cornbread stuffing
½ cup fruit salad	1 cup fruit salad
Snacks	Snacks
8 baby carrots with ranch dressing	8 baby carrots with ranch dressing
1 ounce almonds	1 ounce almonds
1 large soft pretzel	1 cup fat-free flavored yogurt

The *Menu Planner* may be accessed at: www.mypyramid.gov and click on *MyPyramid Menu Planner*.

If you have questions, please contact John Webster or Jackie Haven at (703) 305-7600 or by email at: john.webster@cnpp.usda.gov or jackie.haven@cnpp.usda.gov