



# City Health Information

Volume 34 (2015)

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

No. 7; 54-60

## HELPING PATIENTS MAKE HEALTHY EATING CHOICES

- Talk to every patient about healthy eating—everyone can benefit.
- Explain the healthy eating basics: preference, portions, and proportion.
- Use a simple educational tool such as the Healthy Eating Plate to focus the conversation (page 56).
- Work with your patient to set realistic goals.
- Document goals and follow up at each visit.



In 2010, one-quarter of deaths in the United States were associated with dietary risk factors,<sup>1</sup> and two-thirds of Americans were overweight or obese.<sup>2</sup> Healthy eating patterns can promote overall health, lower the risk of obesity, and help prevent—or, in some cases, control—many chronic diseases and conditions, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, and some cancers. Yet most New Yorkers, like most Americans, do not meet national recommendations for healthy eating.<sup>3</sup> In 2013:

- Three-quarters (76%) of New York City adults said they had eaten fewer than the recommended 5 servings of fruits and vegetables on the previous day—another 13% had eaten *none*.<sup>4</sup>
- The lowest rates of fruit and vegetable consumption were in the lowest income neighborhoods,<sup>4</sup> where fresh, nutritious food is often difficult to find or afford.<sup>5</sup>
- Nearly one-quarter (23%) of adult New Yorkers said they drink 1 or more sugary beverages a day.<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) reported exceeding the recommended daily limit for alcohol consumption in the past month.<sup>4</sup>
- More than half (60%) said they don't consider sodium content when they buy food.<sup>6</sup>

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE [\(Click to access\)](#)

#### INTRODUCTION

#### HEALTHY EATING PATTERNS

A healthy eating pattern (box)

#### HELP PATIENTS MAKE HEALTHIER EATING CHOICES

Approaches to nutrition education for patients (figure)

Healthy Eating Plate (figure)

Healthy eating goals (box)

Overcoming common barriers to healthier eating (box)

Making healthy choices when eating out—tips for patients (box)

#### SUMMARY

When to refer

How to help patients make healthier eating choices

#### RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

#### RESOURCES FOR PATIENTS

#### REFERENCES

### ASK CHI

Have questions or comments about Helping Patients Make Healthy Eating Choices?

E-mail

AskCHI@health.nyc.gov

### IN NEW YORK CITY:

- Major cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death, kills 20,000 adults a year.<sup>6</sup>
- More than half of all adults—more than 3.5 million people—are overweight or obese.<sup>4</sup>
- More than one-quarter of adult New Yorkers, or 1.8 million people, report having hypertension.
- Diabetes, the fourth leading cause of death, kills 1,800 adults a year.<sup>6</sup>
- More New Yorkers than ever—676,000 people (11% of adults)—are living with diabetes.<sup>4</sup>

This issue of *City Health Information* provides tools and resources to help you integrate nutrition advice into routine primary care and help your patients make better food choices.

## HEALTHY EATING PATTERNS

Healthy eating means combining appropriately sized servings of nutritious foods in the optimal proportion to create a balanced diet.<sup>7,8</sup> A healthy eating pattern (**Box 1**<sup>9</sup>) emphasizes vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and healthy proteins. A healthy meal plate is one-half fruits and vegetables, one-quarter whole grains, and one-quarter healthy protein. Refined grains, sodium, sugar-sweetened foods and beverages, alcohol, saturated fat, and red and processed meats should be limited.

### BOX 1. A HEALTHY EATING PATTERN<sup>9</sup>

**Emphasizes**

- Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans and other legumes, and nuts

**Includes**

- Low-fat dairy products and seafood

**Limits**

- Refined grains, sodium, sugar-sweetened foods and beverages, alcohol, saturated fat, and red and processed meats

Patients can achieve a healthy eating pattern with the **DASH, USDA, and American Heart Association** eating plans (**Resources for Patients**).<sup>3,10,11</sup>

*Use a visual aid such as the Healthy Eating Plate to focus the conversation.*

## HELP PATIENTS MAKE HEALTHIER EATING CHOICES

People are increasingly flooded with competing nutritional messages, many of which are misleading and some of which are simply false. Aggressive marketing of unhealthy food, alcohol, and sugary beverages also contributes to consumer confusion about what and how much to eat or drink.

Everyone can build a healthy eating pattern that accommodates personal and cultural food preferences as well as food cost and availability. You can help patients make the right choices by taking one or more of the following approaches, depending on the time available (**Figure 1**).

### Tier 1—When you have only a few minutes

**1. Talk to every patient about a healthy diet.**

Sensitively explain the relationship between diet and health and say that because healthy eating is so important to overall well-being, you talk with all patients about eating patterns. Emphasize easy ways to increase physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle. Recommend methods such as taking the stairs instead of an elevator or walking instead of taking a bus. The Healthy Eating Plate (**Figure 2**) is a simple visual aid that quickly shows patients healthy food choices and proportions.

**2. Ask the patient to choose one or more healthy eating goals.**

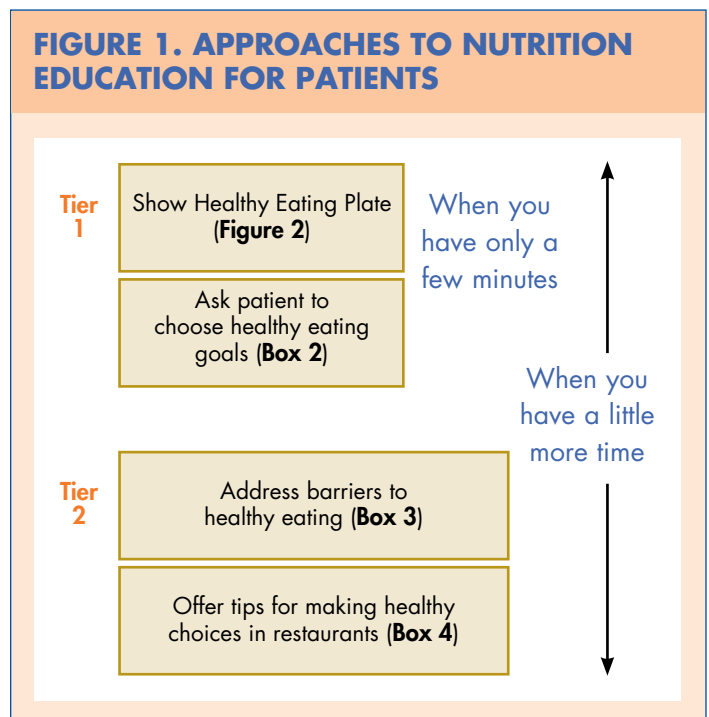
Give patients options for making changes to their eating habits (**Box 2**<sup>3</sup>) and ask which 1 or 2 they think is most important and realistic.

### Tier 2—When you have a little more time

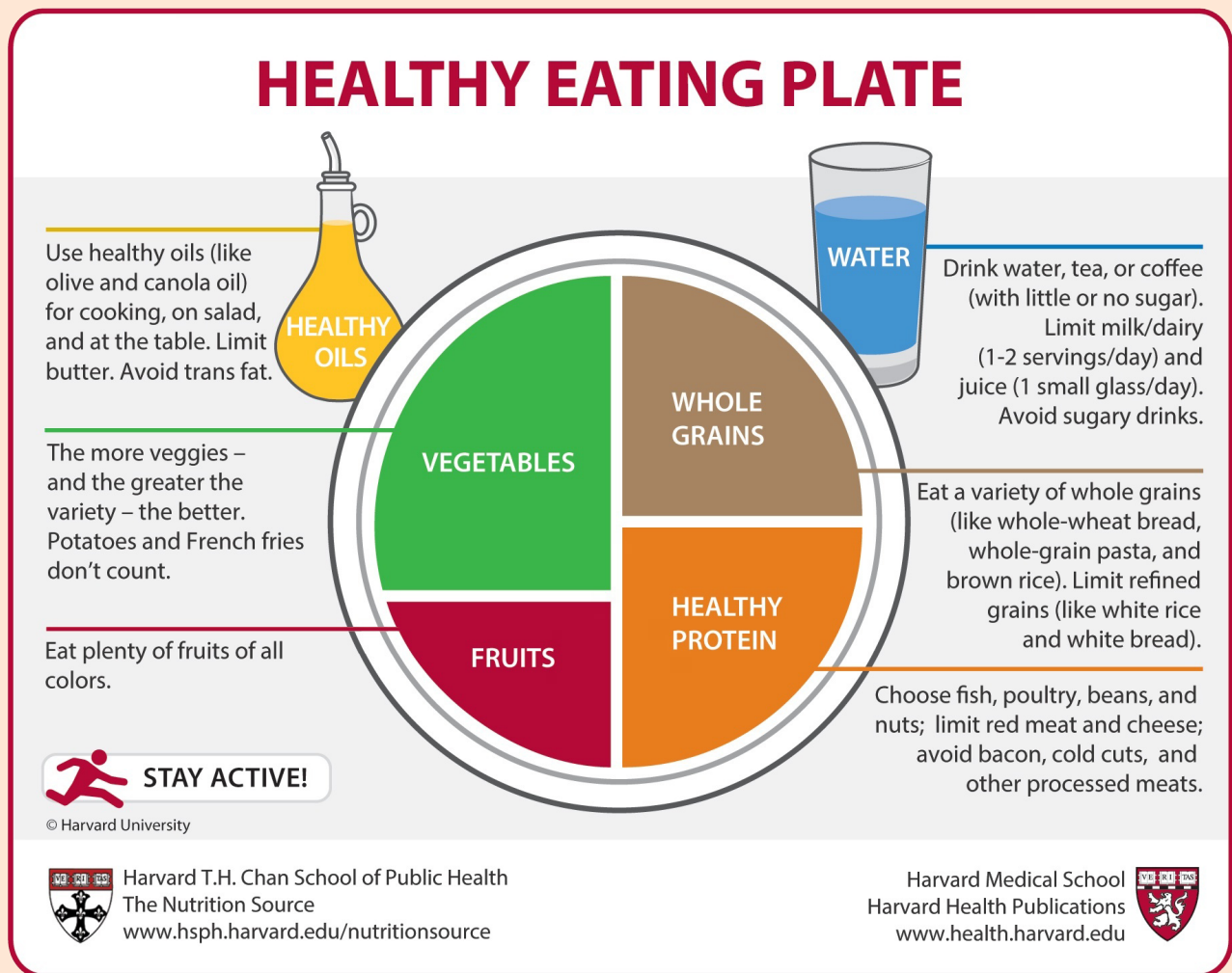
1. Help patients overcome common barriers to healthy eating (**Box 3**<sup>3,12</sup>).

2. Offer tips for making healthier choices when eating out (**Box 4**).

**FIGURE 1. APPROACHES TO NUTRITION EDUCATION FOR PATIENTS**



*Work with your patient to set realistic goals and address barriers.*

**\*FIGURE 2. HEALTHY EATING PLATE**

**\*See Resources for printable version.**

### **\*BOX 2. HEALTHY EATING GOALS<sup>3</sup>**

- Cook at home whenever possible.
- Choose healthy beverages.
  - Drink water and unsweetened beverages instead of sugary drinks; limit juice to 1 small glass (about 6 ounces) of 100% juice a day.
  - Limit or avoid high-sugar coffee and tea drinks.
- Limit sodium.
  - Choose sodium-free or low-sodium foods when buying canned or frozen products or baked goods.
- Eat lots of vegetables.
  - Fill half of your plate with fruits and vegetables; potatoes and plantains are considered starchy vegetables and don't count.
  - Serve 2 kinds of vegetables at each meal—think color.
- Choose healthy protein.
  - Eat healthy protein foods such as beans, peas, unsalted nuts and seeds, poultry (with the skin removed), seafood, soy (tofu, soybeans), eggs, and low-fat dairy.
  - Avoid processed meats (ham, bacon, sausage).
  - Limit red meat to 2 servings per week; choose lean cuts.
  - Eat seafood at least twice a week.
- Choose low-fat dairy.
  - Switch to fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese when choosing dairy.
- Avoid deep-fried and processed foods; try grilling, broiling, roasting, or baking instead of frying.
- Use soybean, corn, olive, and canola oils instead of animal fats, palm oil, or palm kernel oil.
- Make eating sweetened dessert a special treat instead of part of a daily routine.
- Limit or avoid alcoholic beverages.

**\*See Resources for printable version.**

### \*BOX 3. OVERCOMING COMMON BARRIERS TO HEALTHIER EATING<sup>3,12</sup>

No time to cook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cook extra meals on days when you have more time, and freeze for later in the week.</li> </ul>
Too expensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try stews, casseroles, and stir-fried dishes to stretch expensive items like meat.</li> <li>• Nuts, seeds, beans, eggs, and peas are less expensive than meat; try them in casseroles, soups, and salads.</li> <li>• Buy fresh fruits and vegetables in season. Whole fruits are less expensive than precut.</li> <li>• Stock up on healthy frozen or canned foods like low-sodium beans when they're on sale.</li> <li>• If you need food assistance, call 1-866-3-HUNGRY to find out where the nearest food pantry and soup kitchen is and how to apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).</li> </ul>
Fresh fruits and vegetables not available in neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text "SoGood" to 877877 or go to <a href="http://nyc.gov">nyc.gov</a> and search for farmers markets to find one nearby. Most markets accept SNAP.</li> <li>• Consider grocery shopping near places you routinely visit, such as work or day care.</li> <li>• Ask your local bodega to carry fruits and vegetables.</li> <li>• Buy frozen unsweetened fruits and vegetables without added salt.</li> </ul>
Can't give up favorite foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat them less often or try lower-calorie ingredients and lower-fat cooking methods (<b>Resources for Patients—NYC Health Department CalCutter</b>).</li> <li>• Eat smaller portions; fill up on vegetables first.</li> </ul>
No healthy options around work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buy a lunch bag to keep things cold and make it easier to bring food to work.</li> <li>• Bring a lunch and healthy snacks to work. Try fruit or small portions of nuts and seeds.</li> </ul>
Eat out a lot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to choose healthier items from the menu. See <b>Box 4</b>.</li> </ul>

\*See Resources for printable version.

### \*BOX 4. MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES WHEN EATING OUT—TIPS FOR PATIENTS

- Plan your order ahead of time so that you don't order on impulse.
- Drink water with your meal. Avoid sugary drinks and alcohol. If you do drink alcoholic beverages, alternate the drinks with water.
- Watch your calories.
  - Pay attention to calorie listings when provided—for both food and beverages.
  - Start your meal with a salad packed with vegetables so you'll feel satisfied sooner.
  - Order salads with dressing on the side or use a small amount of olive oil and vinegar.
  - Avoid supersized portions at fast-food restaurants. Smaller portions are less expensive.
  - Skip the chips and white bread.
  - Share a main course with a friend or eat just half and take the rest home.
  - Avoid buffets or use a smaller plate at buffets.
  - Push yourself away from the table periodically so you can stop eating; if you are full, take home leftovers.
- Think about your choices before ordering.
  - Choose main dishes that include vegetables, such as stir-fries, kebabs, or pasta with a tomato sauce.
  - Avoid fried foods; choose steamed, grilled, or broiled dishes instead.
  - Choose chicken (without the skin), fish, and lean cuts of beef and pork. Avoid salty cured meats.
  - Order a steamed vegetable instead of potatoes or rice. Think color! Richly colored vegetables have the most nutritional value.
  - Order an extra side of steamed vegetables to make a healthy plate half-filled with vegetables.
  - Choose brown rice and whole wheat bread and pasta when possible.

Sources: New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Adapted from Health Bulletin #86: Eating Out, Eating Well and Choose My Plate (**Resources**)

\*See Resources for printable version.



*Write a prescription for the goals and keep a copy in the medical record.*

## SUMMARY

Unhealthy eating habits contribute to many preventable conditions, including heart disease, stroke, hypertension, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and colon cancer. Help your patients reduce their risk by having a brief conversation about good nutrition at every visit and coaching them to set and achieve healthy eating goals. ♦

### WHEN TO REFER

- Recommend that patients see a registered dietitian<sup>o</sup> if they
  - o are interested in intensive nutritional counseling,
  - o are struggling with making changes to their diet,
  - o have diet-related conditions, such as diabetes or eating disorders.
- Refer patients to an obesity specialist for further assessment and/or intensive behavioral counseling if they are overweight or obese and have additional risk factors for cardiovascular disease.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>o</sup>See the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) for a searchable database of professional nutritionists.

### HOW TO HELP PATIENTS MAKE HEALTHIER EATING CHOICES

- Explain the basics of healthy eating.
- Work with the patient to set realistic goals.
- Document goals and follow up at later visit.

## RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

### Guidelines and Recommendations

- **US Department of Agriculture:** [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)  
Resources based on Dietary Guidelines for Americans; many available in Spanish, Chinese, and other languages
- **Harvard University School of Public Health:** [www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource)  
Nutrition information, Healthy Eating Plate, and other tools
- **US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Agriculture.** Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015: [www.DietaryGuidelines.gov](http://www.DietaryGuidelines.gov)
- **AHA/ACC Guideline on Lifestyle Management to Reduce Cardiovascular Risk, 2013:** [content.onlinejacc.org/article.aspx?articleid=1770218](http://content.onlinejacc.org/article.aspx?articleid=1770218)
- **NIH Obesity Management Guidelines:** [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-pro/guidelines/in-develop/obesity-evidence-review](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-pro/guidelines/in-develop/obesity-evidence-review)
- **Nutrition in Medicine.** Nutrition Training for Special Populations: [nutritioninmedicine.org/portal](http://nutritioninmedicine.org/portal)

### Nutrition Information and Tools

- **New York City Health Department:** [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)
- **City Health Information (CHI) Archives:** [nyc.gov/html/doh/html/data/chi1.shtml](http://nyc.gov/html/doh/html/data/chi1.shtml)
  - o Brief Intervention for Excessive Drinking
  - o Helping Children Reach and Maintain a Healthy Weight

### Printable Patient Education Materials

- **Tools from CHI**
  - o [Healthy Eating Plate](#)
  - o [Healthy eating goals](#)
  - o [Overcoming common barriers to healthier eating](#)
  - o [Tips for making healthy choices when eating out](#)
- **Health Bulletins:** [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health) or call 311
  - o #73 Are You Pouring On the Pounds?
  - o #76 Good Fats/Bad Fats
  - o #86 Eating Out, Eating Well
  - o #92 How to Lose Weight
  - o #95 Choose Less Sodium

## RESOURCES FOR PATIENTS

- **US Department of Agriculture:** [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)
  - MyPlate Videos
  - SuperTracker (personalized nutrition and activity plan)
  - Sample Menus and Recipes
  - Daily Food Plans
  - Food Group Overviews and Portion Sizes
- **US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Agriculture.** Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015: [www.DietaryGuidelines.gov](http://www.DietaryGuidelines.gov)
- **DASH Eating Plan:** [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/heart/hbp\\_low.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/heart/hbp_low.pdf)
- **American Heart Association:** Healthy Eating: [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org) (and search for Healthy Eating)
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.** Nutrition Information for You: [www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/index.html)
- **New York City Health Department**
  - Eating Healthy: [nyc.gov/html/doh/html/living/eating-well.shtml](http://nyc.gov/html/doh/html/living/eating-well.shtml)
  - Have a Healthy Pregnancy: [nyc.gov/html/doh/pregnancy/html/during/nutrition.shtml](http://nyc.gov/html/doh/pregnancy/html/during/nutrition.shtml)
  - CalCutter app: [nyc.gov/html/doh/html/media/apps.shtml](http://nyc.gov/html/doh/html/media/apps.shtml)  
Calculates estimated calories per serving and suggests ways to convert your recipe into a lower-calorie dish
- **New York City–Shop Healthy:** [nyc.gov/html/nycfood/html/shop/shop.shtml](http://nyc.gov/html/nycfood/html/shop/shop.shtml)  
Information about finding healthy groceries
- **ACCESS NYC:** [nyc.gov/accessnyc](http://nyc.gov/accessnyc)  
Information about city, state, and federal benefit programs, including SNAP (food stamps)

## REFERENCES

1. US Burden of Disease Collaborators. The State of US Health, 1990-2010: burden of diseases, injuries, and risk factors. *JAMA*. 2013;310(6):591-608.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Selected health conditions and risk factors, by age: United States, selected years 1988-1994 through 2011-2012. [www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/2014/059.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/2014/059.pdf). Accessed August 31, 2015.
3. US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010. [www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2010/DietaryGuidelines2010.pdf](http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2010/DietaryGuidelines2010.pdf). Accessed April 3, 2014.
4. New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. EpiQuery: NYC Interactive Health Data System. Community Health Survey 2013. [nyc.gov/health/epiquery](http://nyc.gov/health/epiquery). Accessed August 31, 2015.
5. Gordon C, Purciel-Hill M, Ghai NR, Kaufman L, Graham R, Van Wye G. Measuring food deserts in New York City's low-income neighborhoods. *Health Place*. 2011;17(2):696-700.
6. New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. *Summary of Vital Statistics 2013. Appendix A. Supplemental Population, Mortality, Infant Mortality, and Pregnancy Outcome Data Tables*. [nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/vs/appendixa-2013.pdf](http://nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/vs/appendixa-2013.pdf). Accessed September 8, 2015.
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Smart Nutrition 101. [www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/index.html). Accessed August 31, 2015.
8. Harvard University School of Public Health. The Nutrition Source. [www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/). Accessed August 31, 2015.
9. Eckel RH, Jakicic JM, Ard JD, et al. 2013 AHA/ACC Guideline on Lifestyle Management to Reduce Cardiovascular Risk: a Report of the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association Task Force on Practice Guidelines. *J Am Coll Cardiol*. 2014;63(25 Pt B):2960-2984.
10. US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. *Lowering Your Blood Pressure With DASH*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services; 2006. NIH publication no. 06-4082. [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/new\\_dash.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/new_dash.pdf). Accessed August 31, 2015.
11. American Heart Association Nutrition Committee, Lichtenstein AH, Appel LJ, et al. Diet and lifestyle recommendations revision 2006: a scientific statement from the American Heart Association Nutrition Committee. *Circulation*. 2006;114(1):82-96.
12. US Department of Agriculture. Choose My Plate. [choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov). Accessed August 31, 2015.
13. LeFevre ML; US Preventive Services Task Force. Behavioral counseling to promote a healthful diet and physical activity for cardiovascular disease prevention in adults with cardiovascular risk factors: US Preventive Services Task Force Recommendation Statement. *Ann Intern Med*. 2014;161(8):587-593.



42-09 28th Street, Long Island City, NY 11101 (347) 396-2914

**Bill de Blasio**

Mayor

**Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH**

Commissioner of Health and Mental Hygiene

**Division of Epidemiology**

R. Charon Gwynn, PhD, Deputy Commissioner

**Provider Education Program**

Ram Koppaka, MD, PhD, Director

Peggy Millstone, Director, Scientific Education Unit

Peter Ephross, Medical Editor

Rhoda Schlamm, Medical Editor

Abbey Masonbrink, MD, MPH, Public Health/Preventive Medicine Resident

Cortnie Lowe, MFA, Guest Editor

**Consultant:** Cathy Nonas, MS, RD, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Copyright ©2015 The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

E-mail *City Health Information* at: [nycdohrp@health.nyc.gov](mailto:nycdohrp@health.nyc.gov)

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Helping patients make healthy eating choices. *City Health Information*. 2015;34(7):54-60.