Simple Steps to Upgrade the Family Diet:
Nutrition Educator Resource Kit

UPGRADE IT!
PREFACE
Dietary Change Made Simple: Connecting the Dots for Consumers

As a nation, we are experiencing an epidemic of obesity. Today, an estimated 32.7 percent of U.S. adults 20 years and older are overweight, 34.3 percent are obese and 5.9 percent are morbidly obese, resulting in approximately $147 billion in direct and indirect health-care costs annually. And since there is a strong correlation between obesity and such co-morbid conditions as Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and certain types of cancers, these costs are expected to double every 10 years. In fact, by 2030 the health-care costs attributable to overweight and obesity could account for 16 percent to 18 percent of total U.S. health-care costs.

While these statistics are alarming, more problematic is the escalating rate of childhood obesity and the potential consequences for increased prevalence of chronic disease in future years. As stated in The Surgeon General’s Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation, a new action plan issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), obesity prevalence tripled among children and adolescents from 1980 to 2004. This translates to more than 12 million children who are obese and more than 23 million young Americans who are overweight.

Compounding the problem, obesity in children is starting at an early age, with researchers estimating that 21.2 percent of children ages 2 years old to 5 years old are already overweight or obese, a percentage that has more than doubled during the past three decades. Similarly, the obesity rate for children ages 6 years to 11 years has more than quadrupled (4.2% to 19.6%) and tripled among adolescents ages 12 years to 19 years (4.6% to 18.1%) over the past 40 years. As a result, more children are at increased risk for associated so-called adult diseases than ever before, including heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer and osteoarthritis.

The sobering impact of these statistics is reflected in the nation’s concurrent epidemics of heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and other chronic diseases. Accordingly, the U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Regina M. Benjamin recently stated, “Today’s epidemic of overweight and obesity threatens the historic progress we have made in increasing American’s quality and years of healthy life.”

In recognition of this growing health threat, former President Bill Clinton, First Lady Michelle Obama, the current and all living former U.S. Surgeons General and many other health leaders have joined with virtually every major medical society and public health organization in advocating for a comprehensive approach to combating childhood obesity – from providing healthy foods in schools to empowering parents and caregivers to serve healthier meals at home. As First Lady Michelle Obama stated when announcing her Let’s Move! campaign to fight childhood obesity, “Parents and caregivers play a key role in making healthy choices for children and teaching children to make healthy choices for themselves. But in today’s busy world, this isn’t always easy.” Accordingly, one of the goals of the Let’s Move! campaign is to “offer parents and caregivers the tools, support and information they need to make healthier choices and instill healthy habits in children that will last a lifetime.”
In response to this challenge, Shape Up America! and the National Turkey Federation recently launched an awareness campaign to teach Americans that making small modifications to favorite meals is a simple strategy to reduce calories and fat in the family diet. Called Simple Steps to Upgrade Your Diet, the campaign features a free web-based tool – the Meal Upgrade Calculator – that shows consumers how to “upgrade” favorite meals by changing the type of meat and poultry, the side dishes and even the condiments to decrease the amount of fat and calories in breakfast, lunch and dinner menus. Developed by a team of Shape Up America! nutritionists, the calculator features 24 different meals where simple “upgrades” will improve the nutritional profile. Each time the “upgrade” is selected, the calculator shows the amount of fat and calories saved.
Now that the *Meal Upgrade Calculator* is readily available, nutrition educators have a new way to help Americans appreciate the cumulative benefits of small dietary changes and see how easy it is make these changes. To help you put this resource into practice, this kit was developed to provide you with all the background information to incorporate the *Meal Upgrade Calculator* as a teaching tool. Contents include:

- Information on childhood obesity and the goals of First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* campaign
- Background on the “meal upgrade” concept and how the “calculator” was developed
- A list of questions and answers about the *Meal Upgrade Calculator* for responding to questions from colleagues, patients and clients
- Two reproducible fact sheets you can use as handouts when counseling patients and educating consumers

We encourage you to use the *Meal Upgrade Calculator* to counsel consumers about making small changes in meal preparation to improve the family diet. Especially now, when communicating empowering messages about healthy eating are so important, this easy-to-use tool is a way you can help Americans learn how to put important dietary recommendations into practice.

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3. Ogden et al. Obesity Among Adults in the United States, NCHS Data Brief, November 2007
4. Wang et al. *Obesity, Volume 16, Number 10 / October 2008*
UPGRADING THE DIET: AN OVERVIEW

The Diet Upgrade: A New Concept for Promoting Dietary Change

Let’s face it: the terminology used to promote healthy eating is not user-friendly. Consumers are encouraged to eat more “nutrient-dense” foods and to limit their “intake” of “saturated fat,” “trans fat,” “cholesterol,” “added sugars” and “sodium.” These are important health messages but they don’t always resonate with consumers.

What works? According to consumer research conducted for the Dietary Guidelines Alliance, consumers respond best to nutrition messages that:

- Are positive and empowering
- Provide clear, jargon-free information
- Make the advice simple, easy and quick
- Focus on small steps that are readily achievable
- Promote an immediate health benefit (e.g. consuming fewer calories)
- Factor in the concerns of consumers who are stretched for time, on a budget, and must contend with family taste preferences.

Based on these research findings, the Shape Up America!/National Turkey Federation team developed a new concept for promoting dietary change – the “meal upgrade.” Defined as “raising the standard,” “improving the quality” or “enhancing the condition or status” of an item, the word “upgrade” instantly communicates the benefit of making small changes in meal preparation.

Translating this concept into a working definition, a “meal upgrade” is:

**Meal Upgrade** – n., a change in a food and/or ingredients used in preparing a meal that decreases the amount of fat and calories consumed in the meal; can be a change in the type of meat or poultry, the side dishes or the condiments.

Developed to communicate the meaningful health benefits derived from making simple modifications to the family meal, the term “meal upgrade” can be associated with one action or a series of actions that lower the fat and calories in a meal. Thus, the *Meal Upgrade Calculator* takes the consumer through a step-by-step process, starting with the meat choice and then offering a series of options for changing the ingredients in the meal.
Campaign Rationale

When First Lady Michelle Obama launched her Let’s Move! campaign to combat the epidemic of childhood obesity in America, she said, “The physical and emotional health of an entire generation and the economic health and security of our nation is at stake.” Citing obesity rates that have tripled among children over the past three decades, the First Lady cited some of the contributing factors:

- Larger meals – food portions are two to five times larger now than 30 years ago.
- Changes in beverage consumption – compared to the mid-1970s, when the average sweetened drink portions were 13.6 ounces, many children drink 20 ounces of soda at a time.
- Increase in calorie consumption – according to the Let’s Move! campaign, Americans are now consuming 31 percent more calories than 40 years ago, including 56 percent more fats and oils and 14 percent more sugars and sweeteners.
- Significant decline in physical activity – data finds that the average American child spends more than 7.5 hours a day watching TV and movies, using cell phones and computers for entertainment, and playing video games, and only a third of high school students get the recommended levels of physical activity.

To change these trends, the Let’s Move! campaign has four pillars: 1) more nutrition information, 2) increased physical activity, 3) easier access to healthy foods and, 4) personal responsibility. Thus, the campaign is spearheading government initiatives to adopt new front-of-the-package food labeling, revamp the Food Pyramid, improve the nutritional quality of school meals, reduce the number of “food deserts” in low-income urban and rural neighborhoods, and improve the quality and availability of physical education in schools.

Also essential to combating childhood obesity is giving parents and caregivers the tools to serve healthier meals at home. However, these tools must take into account the realities parents face when preparing and serving family meals. Accordingly, Let’s Move! is focusing on informational tools that are readily accessible, easy to use and show consumers – and especially busy moms – how to make improvements to family meals when they are stretched for time, on a tight budget, and must contend with family taste preferences. This is especially important if nutrition educators are to be successful in showing Americans how to make small decreases in food and beverage calories – a key recommendation contained in the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Among the advice contained in the Dietary Guidelines is to keep total fat intake to between 20 percent and 35 percent of calories, and to select meat and poultry products that are lean and low in fat.

Even though the federal government and the public health community have devoted significant time and resources to promoting this common-sense advice, the fact remains that most Americans have no idea what the Dietary Guidelines recommend or how to put this advice into practice. According to the 2010 Health & Food Survey, conducted by the International Food Information Council (IFIC), while 85 percent of consumers are aware of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) food guidance system (MyPyramid) based on the Dietary Guidelines, only 9 percent say they know a lot about MyPyramid and
another 34 percent say they know very little. In addition, as many as 15 percent of adult consumers say they never heard of the MyPyramid system and the vast majority – 71 percent – report not using this food guidance system when making food consumption decisions.

Thus, making it easier for people to understand and incorporate healthful foods into the diet is a priority concern of health and nutrition professionals. According to a January 2009 survey of 500 health professionals conducted by Harris Interactive Service Bureau, the majority of registered dietitians (97%) and pediatricians (96%) surveyed agreed that in order to fight the obesity crisis, Americans need to think positively about what foods to eat to improve their health.¹⁰

Making it easier for consumers to improve their diets also requires connecting the dots, so Americans will recognize the benefits of taking action. Instead of just focusing on the reasons to make dietary change, the public health community must give people the belief they can succeed. This is the approach behind the “upgrade” concept, which demonstrates in a very personal way that making simple modifications to the family diet pays off in quick and meaningful health improvements.

The Impact of Making Small Dietary Change

Before designing the new Simple Steps to Upgrade Your Diet campaign, an important first step was to determine what information would motivate Americans to make changes in the composition of family meals, especially when they are concerned about children’s taste preferences, time pressures and budget constraints. To find the answer, Shape Up America! conducted a nutritional analysis of commonly consumed family meals to document how much an individual can save over a year in reduced calories, fat, saturated fat and cholesterol by making one simple change in the diet once a week.

Since surveys find Americans eat meat and poultry an average of 4.2 times a week,¹¹ the Shape Up America! research focused on calculating the nutritional savings if Americans simply changed the meat protein to turkey, a lean protein that tends to be lower in calories and fat than beef, pork, lamb and veal. The team started by identifying 22 breakfast, lunch and dinner options that are considered easy to prepare, economical and, therefore, frequently served in American households. The researchers used a nutrition database to compare the amount of calories, total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol in the original meat recipe and then in the turkey-based version.

To demonstrate what this simple change produces in improved health, the Shape Up America! team considered two different scenarios over the course of a year if the turkey version was consumed once a week. The first scenario estimated the reduction in calories, total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol if a family added a different turkey meal once a week at either breakfast, lunch or dinner instead of a meal using a higher fat meat protein. The second scenario addressed the potential savings by substituting turkey
in a popular and commonly consumed meal item once a week over the course of a year. Both scenarios assumed that all other factors remain constant.

Calculating the impact over the course of a year, the Shape Up America! research estimated a savings of 6,408 calories a year or almost 2 pounds (1.8 pounds) in excess weight if Americans substitute lean turkey for another meat protein one time a week at alternating meal occasions (i.e., breakfast or lunch or dinner). This change also netted an average reduction in the total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol consumed by 59 percent, 71 percent and 28 percent, respectively.

Because many families consume similar menu items from week to week, Shape Up America! also examined the annual health savings if Americans served a lower-fat turkey version of the same meat-based food item once a week. Here, the research team chose lasagna, because it is a popular and economical dish that many families serve frequently. By substituting lean ground turkey for ground beef in the lasagna recipe and making some other modifications to the recipe (light pasta sauce, lower-fat cheeses) the researchers obtained a savings per meal occasion of 239 calories and an annual savings of 12,428 calories or 3.6 pounds a year. In addition, these simple changes to the lasagna recipe resulted in an average reduction in the total fat consumed by 66 percent, 73 percent and 22 percent, respectively.

Beyond these two scenarios, Shape Up America! calculated the average calorie savings per meal occasion when lean turkey is substituted on a daily basis. This is an important benchmark for documenting what this one dietary change could mean in reducing overweight and obesity. Using the savings from the 22 meals studied, the researchers determined that just changing the meat to turkey in a family meal nets an average savings of 108 calories per meal occasion. From a health perspective, this calorie reduction is significant if sustained on a daily basis. In fact, two papers published in the July/August 2009 *American Journal of Health Promotion* estimate that a permanent 100 calorie-a-day reduction would eliminate approximately 71.2 million cases of overweight/obesity and save $58 billion annually in medical expenses to yield an estimated boost in economic productivity of more than $100 billion annually.

Taken together, these estimates provide “the evidence” that small “upgrades” in meal preparation achieve meaningful and measurable results and, thus, give consumers what marketers call “the reason to believe” in the campaign’s messages. Using these research findings as the foundation, the team then developed the *Meal Upgrade Calculator*, which shows consumers how to achieve these health savings by making small modifications – or “upgrades” – to favorite family meals.

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**CHANGING TO TURKEY ONCE A WEEK NETS:**

- An estimated savings of 6,408 calories a year or almost 2 pounds (1.8 pounds) in excess weight
- An average savings of 108 calories per meal occasion.
- An average reduction in the total fat consumed by 59 percent
- An average reduction in the total saturated fat consumed by 71 percent
WHY UPGRADE WITH TURKEY

When designing the *Meal Upgrade Calculator*, Shape Up America! nutritionists first selected the meal options to feature on the website and then mapped out a range of easy modifications to each meal that would improve the nutritional profile. Taking into account that Americans eat meat and poultry an average of 4.2 times a week, the team determined that the first change would be to substitute the meat protein with turkey, which is a lean protein source that is also versatile and easily substituted for higher-fat meats.

Focusing on turkey’s nutritional profile, turkey is nutrient-rich, low in fat and calories and is considered an excellent protein source. A 3-ounce serving of boneless, skinless turkey breast contains 26 grams of protein. When compared to other meats, turkey breast also has one of the lowest saturated fat levels at less than 1 gram in a 3-ounce portion.

The following chart shows how turkey compares to other meat protein sources:

### How turkey stacks up against other proteins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protein 3 ounces (85 to 87 grams)</th>
<th>Calories</th>
<th>Total fat grams</th>
<th>Saturated Fat grams</th>
<th>Cholesterol milligrams</th>
<th>Sodium milligrams</th>
<th>Protein grams</th>
<th>Iron % DV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkey Breast</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken Breast</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef (Top loin, steak)</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef (Eye round)</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork (Top loin, chop)</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork (Tenderloin roast)</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamb (Loin)</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamb (Shank)</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veal (Loin)</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veal (Shank)</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground Turkey</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground Beef (80/20 mix)</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protein 3-1/2 ounces or 100 grams</th>
<th>Calories</th>
<th>Total fat grams</th>
<th>Saturated Fat grams</th>
<th>Cholesterol milligrams</th>
<th>Sodium milligrams</th>
<th>Protein grams</th>
<th>Iron % DV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkey, fryer/roaster, dark meat</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28.84</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken, broiler/fryer, dark meat</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>27.37</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All proteins listed are: Skinless, trimmed of visible fat, and cooked
Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 22
Update: 2010
At the same time, turkey contains many essential nutrients, such as niacin and vitamins B6 and B12, which are important for digestive health and replenishing red blood cells. Moreover, turkey is high in zinc, phosphorus and selenium, which are important for normal growth and development and to protect cells against damage.

Being nutrient-rich, however, is only part of the equation. Turkey is also easily substituted for high-fat meats in a wide variety dishes to deliver less calories and fat. Turkey also comes in a wide variety of cuts from the turkey breast roast and turkey cutlets to turkey tenderloin and ready-to-eat turkey dishes. This makes it possible to substitute turkey for beef tenderloin, beef stir fry and even London Broil. In each case, the health savings are significant but the dishes remain tasty and easy to prepare.
THE MEAL UPGRADE CALCULATOR: A NEW TOOL FOR FAMILIES

The centerpiece of the Simple Steps to Upgrade Your Diet campaign is the Meal Upgrade Calculator — a free online tool (www.MealUpgrade.com) that shows consumers how simple changes in meal preparation add up to meaningful health improvements. Developed by Shape Up America! and the National Turkey Federation (NTF), the calculator features 24 different meals where simple “upgrades” will improve the nutritional profile. Each time the “upgrade” is selected, the calculator shows the amount of fat and calories saved.

To design the Meal Upgrade Calculator, a team of Shape Up America! nutritionists first selected four breakfasts, 10 lunches and 10 dinner options to feature on the website, using the following criteria: 1) the meals are easy to prepare, 2) the dishes are economical; and 3) the dishes are frequently served in American households. The next step was to map out a range of easy modifications to each meal that would improve the nutritional profile. Here, the researchers agreed that the first change would be to substitute the meat protein with turkey. Other potential “upgrades” entailed altering the side dishes, switching to higher fiber breads and changing the condiments.

Once the team mapped out the possible changes in the 24 meals, they used a nutrition database to chart the nutritional savings associated with each “upgrade.” In each case, the nutritionists started with the total number of calories and fat in the original meal and then subtracted the savings achieved by each “upgrade.” Thus, people using the calculator will first see the savings from “upgrading” the meat to turkey. Following this change, consumers then have the option of making a series of other “upgrades” to the meal, each time seeing what these changes produce in terms of less fat and calories.
For ease of use, the **Meal Upgrade Calculator** takes the visitor through a step-by-step process, starting with the selection of the meal occasion (breakfast, lunch or dinner). After making this choice, the visitor is taken to a page where photos of the different meals are featured. To select the specific dish, the consumer clicks on the “Upgrade It!” button and immediately sees the impact of “upgrading” the meat to turkey. This is followed by a series of prompts where the visitor is presented with a range of choices, each time seeing how the change lowers the fat and calories. Then, at the end of the process, the site provides links to the “upgraded” turkey recipe as well as links to similar recipes.

Considered a teaching tool as well as a nutrition calculator, the **Meal Upgrade Calculator** uses each meal occasion to provide simple tips on healthy eating and meal preparation. Moreover, the site poses the question, “What If Everyone Upgraded?” so Americans can appreciate the cumulative benefits of small dietary changes. Here, the site summarizes new research findings from Shape Up America! that show by just changing the meat to turkey in a family meal nets an average savings of 108 calories per eating occasion.

Designed for widespread use by consumers and nutrition educators, the **Meal Upgrade Calculator** provides an engaging and entertaining tool to counsel individuals and families about healthier eating. The **Meal Upgrade Calculator** is available on the websites of both Shape Up America! and NTF at [www.shapeup.org](http://www.shapeup.org) and [www.EatTurkey.com](http://www.EatTurkey.com).
UPGRADING THE FAMILY DIET
Questions and Answers

The following are recommended answers to the questions that may be asked by colleagues, patients and clients.

Q. When you encourage consumers to “upgrade” the family diet, what exactly do you mean?

A. The term “upgrade” is a new way to help consumers understand the benefits of making small, yet meaningful changes in meal preparation. The definition of a “meal upgrade” is a change in a food or the ingredients used when preparing a meal that decreases the amount of fat and calories in that meal.

Q. Why just focus on small dietary changes? Is this the best way to get Americans to serve healthier meals?

A. The value of making small dietary change that leads to less fat and calories consumed is well documented. In fact, two papers published in the July/August 2009 American Journal of Health Promotion estimate that a permanent 100 calorie-a-day reduction would eliminate approximately 71.2 million cases of overweight/obesity and save $58 billion annually in medical expenses to yield an estimated boost in economic productivity of more than $100 billion annually.

Linking these findings with solutions-oriented information also provides consumers with what marketers call “a reason to believe” – a compelling reason to take action. This is the approach behind the “upgrade” concept, which demonstrates in a very personal way that making simple modifications to the family meal pays off in quick and meaningful health improvements.

Q. What is the Meal Upgrade Calculator?

A. The Meal Upgrade Calculator is a free online tool (www.MealUpgrade.com) that shows consumers how simple changes in meal preparation add up to meaningful health improvements. Developed by Shape Up America! and the National Turkey Federation (NTF), the calculator features 24 different meals where simple “upgrades” will improve the nutritional profile. Each time the “upgrade” is selected, the calculator shows the amount of fat and calories saved.

Q. What is the purpose of the Meal Upgrade Calculator?

A. The Meal Upgrade Calculator was developed in response to First Lady Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! initiative to fight childhood obesity and is intended to provide consumers, and especially busy moms, with a tool that shows them how to modify favorite meals so families can reap the benefits of consuming less fat and calories.
When Mrs. Obama launched the Let’s Move! campaign, she called for new information tools that are readily accessible, easy to use and show consumers – and especially busy moms – how to make improvements to family meals when they are stretched for time, on a tight budget, and must contend with family taste preferences. The Meal Upgrade Calculator was developed to fill this need.

Q. What dietary advice does the Meal Upgrade Calculator provide?

A. The Meal Upgrade Calculator was developed to show Americans how to make small decreases in food calories – a key recommendation contained in the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Among the advice contained in the Dietary Guidelines is to keep total fat intake to between 20 percent and 35 percent of calories, and to select meat and poultry products that are lean and low in fat. The “calculator” translates this advice into simple changes in meal preparation that reduce the fat and calories families consume.

Q. How was the Meal Upgrade Calculator developed?

A. To design the Meal Upgrade Calculator, a team of Shape Up America! (SUA) nutritionists selected 24 meals to feature on the website, applying the following criteria: 1) the meals are easy to prepare, 2) the dishes are economical, and 3) the dishes are frequently served in American households. The SUA team then mapped out a range of easy modifications to each meal that would improve the nutritional profile and used a nutrition database to chart the nutritional savings associated with each “upgrade.” In each case, the nutritionists started with the total number of calories and fat in the original meal and then subtracted the savings achieved by each “upgrade.”

Because meat and poultry provide a significant amount of the fat and calories in family meals, the researchers agreed that the first change would be to substitute the meat protein with turkey, which is nutrient-rich, low in fat and calories and is considered an excellent protein source. Following this change, consumers then have the option of making a series of other “upgrades” to the meal, each time seeing what these changes produce in terms of less fat and calories.

Q. Why promote turkey as a diet “upgrade”? Aren’t there other low-fat meat sources?

A. Shape Up America! nutritionists selected turkey as the center piece for the “calculator” because turkey is nutrient-rich, and can be easily substituted for higher-fat meats in a wide variety dishes to deliver less calories and fat.

Besides being low in fat and calories, turkey is an excellent protein source. A 3-ounce serving of boneless, skinless turkey breast contains 26 grams of protein. Compared to other meats, turkey breast also has one of the lowest saturated fat levels at less than 1 gram in a 3-ounce portion.
Q. What are some of the “upgrades” featured in the Meal Upgrade Calculator?

A. What makes this new online tool so helpful is it shows consumers how they can modify the ingredients in favorite family dishes, from hot dogs and hamburgers to chili and lasagna. This includes changing the side dish to a healthier fruit or vegetable option, changing the topping and making some easy substitutions, such as using spray butter flavoring on a baked potato.

Q. What about promoting fruits and vegetables? Why is this missing?

A. The purpose of the Meal Upgrade Calculator is to provide consumers with a free online tool that will help them make small, yet meaningful changes in the family diet, including “upgrading” menus to add more servings of fruit and vegetables. Thus, this tool is meant to complement the advice contained in the Dietary Guidelines, which includes consuming fruits, vegetables and whole grains on a daily basis.

Q. If consumers use the Meal Upgrade Calculator, how much are they likely to save in reduced fat and calories in the family meal?

A. Before developing the Meal Upgrade Calculator, Shape Up America! conducted a nutrition assessment to document how much an individual can save over a year in reduced calories, fat, saturated fat and cholesterol by making one simple change in the diet once a week – in this case, substituting turkey for higher fat meat and poultry products in 22 breakfast, lunch and dinner menus. This analysis found an average savings of 108 calories per meal occasion, an important benchmark for documenting what this one dietary change could mean in reducing overweight and obesity. Since the calculator provides a range of options for modifying the family meal, the potential savings in fat and calories can be much greater.

Q. Who funded the Meal Upgrade Calculator?

A. The Meal Upgrade Calculator is a joint project of Shape Up America! and the National Turkey Federation.

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It’s Time to Give the Family Diet an Upgrade!

Today, a third of America’s youth is overweight. That’s why First Lady Michelle Obama and public health leaders want to help consumers make smarter choices when preparing family meals.

Now this help is available. It’s called the **Meal Upgrade Calculator** – a free online tool that shows you how to prepare favorite dishes at breakfast, lunch and dinner so you can reap the benefits of consuming less calories and fat. The key is to learn how to “upgrade” these meals by changing the type of meat or poultry, the side dishes and even the condiments.

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**What Exactly Is a Diet Upgrade?**

Have you ever been upgraded to a better seat on an airplane? Well, now you can give the family diet an “upgrade” too. Here is a new definition to add to your vocabulary:

**Meal Upgrade** – n., a change in a food and/or ingredients used in preparing a meal that decreases the amount of fat and calories consumed in the meal; can be a change in the type of meat or poultry, the side dishes or the condiments.

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**Small Changes DO Make a Difference!**

Here is an amazing fact: a comparison study recently conducted by Shape Up America! found that making **one simple change** when preparing favorite family meals – substituting turkey for certain cuts of beef, pork or chicken – **produced an average savings of 108 calories** per meal occasion.

Now think about this: studies predict 71.2 million fewer cases of overweight and obesity and savings of $58 billion annually in medical expenses if Americans simply consume 100 fewer calories a day. So if everyone made simple upgrades to their meals, consider how much healthier we all will be!

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**Start With the Meat Protein!**

Here is another fact worth considering: on average, Americans eat meat and poultry 4.2 times a week. Because a lot of the fat and calories in a meal come from the meat source, one small change that can make a big difference is to **upgrade favorite dishes with turkey** – considered by nutritionists as the “perfect protein.” This is because turkey is low in calories and fat, and can be easily substituted for a number of other meat products, such as ground beef and sausage.

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**Other Ways to Upgrade the Family Meal**

Here are some simple ways to make small but meaningful improvements to favorite family meals:

- **Change the side dish to a lower fat option** – For example, serve a baked potato instead of French fries, opt for baked potato chips, or serve vegetarian baked beans
- **Change the toppings** – Here, some ideas are to use low-fat cheese, light mayonnaise or light spaghetti sauce
- **Make some easy substitutions** – For example, use spray butter flavoring or fruit spread instead of butter or margarine on bread

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Want to know more? Check out the **Meal Upgrade Calculator** at [www.MeatUpgrade.com](http://www.MeatUpgrade.com).
Today, nearly one in three children is overweight or obese, which is why First Lady Michelle Obama and the nation’s health leaders want consumers to make smarter choices when preparing family meals. Now there is a free online tool to help you. It is called the Meal Upgrade Calculator and it will show you how to make small yet meaningful changes in family meals so they are lower in calories – which is the key to combating obesity.

What Is a Calorie Anyway?
Quite simply, a “calorie” is a unit of energy. You burn calories when your body converts food into energy to fuel the body’s daily functioning. The problem comes when you take in more calories in the diet than the body needs. The body stores excess calories as fat and when they reach 3,500 calories, they add an extra pound of weight to your frame.

Calories Count at Breakfast
According to nutrition experts, a healthy breakfast is rich in protein and provides some fiber. Here are some simple ways the Meal Upgrade Calculator helps you “upgrade” this important family meal:

- **Upgrade the protein to a low-fat source** – For example, use an egg substitute when making scrambled eggs or batter for French toast
- **Upgrade the meat to turkey** – By serving turkey bacon, turkey sausage or ground turkey in family breakfasts, you can lower the fat and calories without any tradeoffs in taste
- **Make some easy substitutions** – For example, use spray butter flavoring or fruit spread instead of butter or margarine on bread

Upgrade Favorite Lunches
A healthy lunch is one that provides the essential nutrients – carbohydrates, protein, fiber and some fat. Here are some tips for “upgrading” favorite family lunches:

- **Upgrade to turkey** – Whether it is a BLT, a pastrami sandwich or the much desired hot dog, an easy way to lower the fat and calories in the lunch is by changing the meat to turkey
- **Choose high fiber breads** – This won’t change the calories in the meal but it will help ensure the family gets enough daily fiber
- **Change the toppings and condiments** – For example use light mayonnaise and fat-free salad dressings

Upgrade Family Dinners
A healthy dinner is one that includes at least three of the four food groups: 1) lean protein, 2) fruits and vegetables, 3) milk products and 4) grain products. To lower the fat and calories in these dishes, here are some upgrade tips:

- **Upgrade the meat protein to turkey** – Turkey comes in a wide variety of cuts from the turkey breast roast to turkey tenderloin and ready-to-eat turkey dishes. That is why turkey can be used to “upgrade” beef tenderloin, beef stir fry and even London Broil
- **Change the side dish to a lower fat option** – For example, serve a baked potato instead of French fries or opt for mashed sweet potatoes instead or regular mashed potatoes
- **Change the toppings** – Here, some ideas are to use low-fat cheese, light spaghetti sauce and low-fat salad dressings
- **Make some easy substitutions** – For example, change the butter to butter spray on a baked potato or substitute margarine for butter when making mashed potatoes

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