



The Food Guide Pyramid: A Guide to Daily Food Choices

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What should you eat to stay healthy?

The best nutrition advice is to follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. There are seven guidelines for a healthful diet developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The Dietary Guidelines are advice for healthy Americans, two years of age or older. Following the Dietary Guidelines can help you enjoy better health and lower your chances of getting certain diseases.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Eat a variety of foods to get the energy, protein, vitamins, minerals, and fiber you need for good health.

Maintain a healthy weight to reduce your chances of having high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, certain cancers, and the most common kind of diabetes.

Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol to reduce your risk of heart disease and certain types of cancer. Because fat contains over twice the calories of an equal amount of carbohydrate or protein, a diet low in fat also can help you maintain a healthy weight.

Choose a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits, and grain products which provide needed vitamins, minerals, fiber and complex carbohydrates, and can help you lower your fat intake.

Use sugars only in moderation. A diet with lots of sugars has too many calories and too few nutrients for most people and can contribute to tooth decay.

Use salt and sodium only in moderation to help reduce your risk of high blood pressure.

If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation. Alcoholic beverages supply calories,

but little or no nutrients. Drinking alcohol is also the cause of many health problems, accidents, and can lead to addiction.

What's In Food For You?

You need to get more than 40 different nutrients from food for good health. Nutrients include vitamins, minerals, protein, carbohydrate, fats, and water. These nutrients should come from a variety of foods. Foods are also your best source of fiber. Any food that supplies calories and nutrients can be part of a nutritious diet. It is the overall content of the diet that counts.

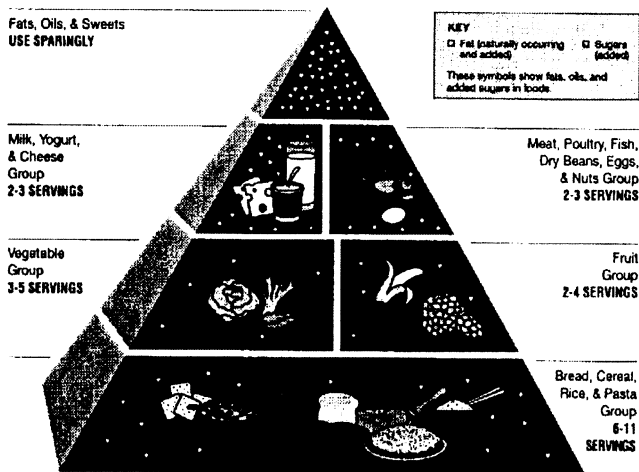
Many foods are good sources of nutrients. For example, Dairy foods are an excellent source of calcium, but a poor source of iron. Muscle meats are an excellent source of iron, but a poor source of calcium. No single food can supply all the nutrients needed for a healthy diet, you must eat a variety of foods. One way to be sure you get all the nutrients you need for a healthy diet is to choose foods following the Food Guide Pyramid food groups.

The Food Guide Pyramid

The Food Guide Pyramid is a guide to daily food choices that puts the Dietary Guidelines into action. The Food Guide Pyramid is an outline of what to eat each day. It is not a rigid prescription, but a general guide that lets you choose a healthful diet that is right for you. The Food Guide Pyramid calls for eating a variety of foods to get the nutrients you need and the right amount of calories to maintain a healthy weight. The Pyramid also focuses on lower fat, because most American diets are too high in fat, especially saturated fat.

Looking at the Pieces of the Pyramid

The Food Guide Pyramid emphasizes foods from the five major food groups shown in the lower levels of the Pyramid. Each of these food groups provides some, but not all, of the nutrients you need every day. Foods in one group cannot replace foods in another group. No one food group is more important than the other. For good health you



The Food Guide Pyramid

need them all. Use the Food Guide Pyramid to help you eat better every day.

At the base of the Food Guide Pyramid are breads, cereals, rice and pasta. These are all foods from grains. You need the most servings of these foods each day. These foods provide complex carbohydrate (starches), which are an important source of energy especially in low-fat diets. They also provide B vitamins, protein, iron, and fiber. The Food Guide Pyramid suggests **6 to 11 servings** of these foods each day.

The next level of the pyramid contains two food groups that come from plants, the vegetable group and the fruit group. Vegetables provide vitamins A, C, and folate, magnesium and iron. These are naturally low in fat and good sources of fiber. The Food Guide Pyramid suggests **3 to 5 vegetable servings** each day.

Fruits and fruit juices provide important amounts of vitamin C, vitamin A and potassium. They are high in fiber, but low in fat and sodium. The Food Guide Pyramid suggests **2 to 4 fruit servings** each day.

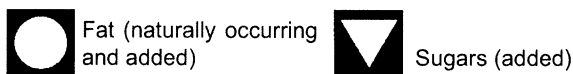
On the third level of the Food Guide Pyramid are two groups of foods that come mostly from animals. Meat, poultry, and fish supply protein, iron, zinc, vitamins B6, and B12. The other foods in this group — dry beans, eggs, and nuts — are similar to meats in providing protein and most vitamins and minerals. The Food Guide Pyramid suggests **2 to 3 servings** each day of foods from this group. The total amount of these servings should be the equivalent of 5 to 7 ounces of cooked

lean meat, poultry, or fish per day.

The milk, yogurt, and cheese group provides calcium, protein, phosphorus, vitamins A, D, B6, and B12. Dairy products are your best food source of calcium. The Food Guide Pyramid suggests **2 servings** each day for most people, and **3 servings** each day for women who are pregnant or breast-feeding, children, teenagers, and young adults up to age 24.

At the tip of the Pyramid are fats, oils, and sweets. These are foods such as salad dressings, oils, cream, butter, margarine, sugars, soft drinks, candies, and sweet desserts. These foods provide calories but few nutrients. By using foods from the tip of the Pyramid sparingly, you can have a diet that supplies vitamins and minerals without excess calories. The small circles inside the pyramid symbolize the fat content in foods. The small triangles in the pyramid symbolize the sugar content of foods.

These symbols show fats, oils and added sugars in foods.



The fat and sugar symbols are concentrated in the tip of the Pyramid, but some fat or sugar symbols are shown in the other food groups. This is because some food choices in the food groups can also be high in fat or added sugars. When choosing foods for a healthful diet, consider the fat and added sugars in your choices from the food groups, as well as from the fats, oils and sweets from the Pyramid tip.

What Counts as a Serving

Breads, Cereals, Rice, and Pasta Group

- 1 slice of bread
- 1/2 hamburger or hotdog bun
- 1 ounce of ready-to-eat-cereal
- 1/2 cup of cooked rice or pasta
- 1/2 cup of cooked cereal

Vegetable Group

- 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables
- 1/2 cup of chopped raw or cooked vegetables
- 3/4 cup of vegetable juice

Fruit Group

- 1 medium apple, banana, orange, pear, or peach
- 1/2 cup of chopped, cooked, or canned fruit
- 1/4 cup of dried fruit
- 3/4 cup of fruit juice

Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group

- 1 cup of milk or yogurt
- 1 1/2 ounces of natural cheese
- 2 ounces of processed cheese

Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs, and Nut Group

2 to 3 ounces of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish is a serving. Three ounces is about the size of a deck of playing cards.

1/2 cup of cooked beans, 1 egg, or 2 tablespoons of peanut butter is 1 ounce of lean meat, or about 1.3 serving.

How Many Servings Do You Need Each Day?

The Pyramid shows a range of servings for each food group. The number of servings that is right for you depends on how many calories you need. Almost everyone should have at least the lowest number of recommended servings.

Selection Tips

Breads, Cereals, Rice, and Pasta Group

- To get the fiber you need, choose several servings a day of foods made from whole grains such as whole-wheat bread and whole-grain cereals.
- Choose most often foods that are made with little fat or sugars. These include bread, English muffins, rice, and pasta.

- Baked goods made from flour, such as cakes, cookies, croissants, and pastries, count as part of this food group, but they are high in fat and sugars.
- Go easy on the fat and sugars you add as spreads, seasonings, or toppings.
- When preparing pasta, stuffing, and sauce from packaged mixes, use only half the butter or margarine suggested; if milk or cream is called for, use low-fat milk.

Vegetable Group

- Different types of vegetables provide different nutrients. Eat a variety.
- Include dark-green leafy vegetables and legumes several times a week. These are especially good sources of vitamins and minerals.
- Go easy on the fat you add to vegetables at the table or during cooking. Added spreads or toppings, such as butter, mayonnaise, and salad dressings count as fat.
- Use low-fat salad dressings.

Fruit Group

- Choose fresh fruits, fruit juices, frozen, canned, or dried fruit. Go easy on fruits canned or frozen in heavy syrups and sweetened fruit juices.
- Eat whole fruits often, they are higher in fiber than fruit juices.
- Count only 100 percent fruit juice as fruit. Punches, ades, and most fruit "drinks" contain only a little juice and lots of added sugar.

	<i>Women & some older adults</i>	<i>Children, teen girls, active women, most men</i>	<i>Teen boys & active men</i>
Calorie Level*	about 1,600	about 2,200	about 2,800
Bread group	6	9	11
Vegetable group	3	4	5
Fruit group	2	3	4
Milk group	**2-3	**2-3	**2-3
Meat group	2, for a total of 5 ounces	2, for a total of 6 ounces	3 for a total of 7 ounces

*These are the calorie levels if you choose lean meats and low-fat foods from the five major food groups and use foods from the fats, oils, and sweets group sparingly.

**Women who are pregnant or breast-feeding, children, teenagers, and young adults to age 24 need 3 servings.

Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group

- Choose low-fat or skim milk and nonfat yogurt often. They are lowest in fat.
- 1 1/2 to 2 ounces of cheese and 8 ounces of yogurt count as a serving from this group because they supply the same amount of calcium as 1 cup of milk.
- Choose "part skim" or low-fat cheeses when available and lower fat milk desserts, like ice milk or frozen yogurt.

Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs, and Nut Group

- Choose lean meats and fish. Use dry beans and peas more often, they are low in fat and high in fiber.
- Prepare meats in low-fat ways. Trim away all the fat you can see. Remove the skin from poultry before eating. Broil, roast, or boil these foods instead of frying them.
- Nuts and seeds are high in fat, therefore eat them in moderation.

Fats, Oils, and Sweets

- Go easy on fats and sugars added to foods in cooking or at the table. Use butter, margarine, gravy, salad dressing, sugar, and jelly sparingly.
- Choose fewer foods that are high in sugar such as candy, sweet desserts, and soft drinks.

References

- The Food Guide Pyramid: A Guide to Daily Food Choices, Home and Garden Bulletin Number 252, United States Department of Agriculture, Human Nutrition Information Service, US Government Printing Office, 1992.
- Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans, Home and Garden Bulletin Number 232, United States Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and Human Service, US Government Printing Office, 1990.