

SCALING THE DIETARY PYRAMID

The USDA Food Guide Pyramid offers personalized content based on your age, gender and activity level. It offers advice on eating plans and interactive tools to help you plan and assess your dietary choices.

Unlike its predecessor, the current Food Guide Pyramid subscribes to a “one size does not fit all” mindset, symbolizing a personalized approach to healthy eating and physical activity. The revised tool is designed to be simple and user-friendly, and was developed to remind consumers to make healthy food choices and be active every day.

Six themes are incorporated into the Pyramid design:

- **Activity**—Physical activity is a new addition to the Pyramid, as represented by the person climbing the steps. Increasing your physical activity, while maintaining a proper diet, will expedite your journey to better health.
- **Moderation**—The structure of this Pyramid reminds us that all foods are okay in moderation and that excluding entire food groups is not the way to go. Instead, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends that you eat a variety of foods and understand where each fits into a healthy diet. The food groups with wider bases should be selected more often, as foods in these groups have little or no solid fats or added sugars.
- **Personalization**—Personalization is illustrated by the person, the slogan and the URL.
- **Proportionality**—The concept of proportionality is conveyed via the different widths of the food group bands. Each stripe’s width roughly approximates the relative quantity of food you should consume from that group (for example, the purple “meat and beans” stripe is much narrower than the green “vegetables” stripe).
- **Variety**—The colored stripes represent the five food groups, with the sixth stripe representing oils. Together, these stripes identify the groups that are needed each day for good health.
- **Gradual Improvement**—Gradual improvement is encouraged by the slogan suggesting that individuals can benefit from taking small steps to improve their diets and lifestyles each day.

No More Guessing on Serving Sizes

One of the more confusing aspects of the previous Food Guide Pyramids was their use of “serving sizes.” Many people simply could not determine what was considered a single serving, especially with certain foods and restaurant portions expanding before their very eyes. To combat this confusion, the USDA instead uses measurable quantities like cups and ounces to create the current Pyramid, making it much more user-friendly.

For example, a 45-year-old female who exercises 30 to 60 minutes each day may have looked at the old Pyramid and wondered where exactly her needs fell within the broad recommendation to eat six to 11 servings of bread, cereal, rice and pasta. Now she knows that she needs 6 ounces of grains each day, half of which should be whole grains. If she lengthens her workouts beyond the 60-minute mark, that recommendation goes up to 7 ounces daily.

To make things even easier, the website provides lists of foods that fall into each category (including which grains are whole), snack recommendations and key words to look for on a food label. This same level of detail is offered for each of the food groups.

Take the Time to Understand the Pyramid

To take advantage of the many consumer-friendly tools, visit www.MyPyramid.gov, enter your information and start exploring. This new Pyramid offers such details as how many orange vegetables to eat each week and how many “discretionary calories” you’re allowed each day.

While some people may miss the stick-on-the-fridge friendliness of the old Pyramid, the new Food Guide Pyramid reflects the modern fitness consumer’s need for more and more information. So take the time to really explore the site, not only for yourself but also for your loved ones. It still may be tough to choose an orange vegetable over those discretionary cookies when the time for dessert rolls around, but you’ll be armed with plenty of knowledge to make the wise decision as often as possible.



The website offers a “MyPyramid Tracker,” an in-depth assessment of your diet quality and physical-activity status. The dietary tool tracks your diet and makes recommendations, while the activity tool tracks your activity and evaluates your data to create a physical-activity score. The site provides specific recommendations for improvement based on your score, including general activities and specific exercises with detailed instructions.

The latest addition to the site is the “MyPyramid Menu Planner,” which helps you make food choices that meet your Food Guide Pyramid goals.

Additional Resource

www.MyPyramid.gov

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org/GetFit and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts!™



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