

## **The New Food Guide Pyramid Is Inviting You To Step Up To Good Nutrition**

Wanda H. Howell, PhD, RD

You may remember the 'old' Food Guide Pyramid that had the horizontal bands representing different food groups and recommended numbers of servings to eat from each group for good nutrition. Now there is a new look and a new approach to the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) food intake recommendations.

It's called MyPyramid, and it emphasizes that people of different genders, ages, and physical activity levels have different nutritional needs. When you look at this new Pyramid, you will see vertical bands of different width representing the relative amount that should be consumed from each food group. You won't see a recommended number of servings to be eaten from each group.

To get information about quantity of the different foods to eat, you can take advantage of the 'customized' diet recommendations for your specific gender, age and activity level. It's simple if you have access to the internet. Go to [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov) and follow the instructions for entering your personal information. You will get a recommended calorie intake level and specific numbers of servings from each of the food groups to eat every day. For example, if you indicate that you are a 35 year-old male who is moderately active, your recommended calorie level is 2000. These 2000 calories are distributed among the food groups as follows: 6 ounces of grains; 2 ½ cups of vegetables; 2 cups of fruits; 3 cups of milk; and 5 ½ ounces of meat or beans. You may wonder what portion size an ounce of grains would be. That translates to 1 slice of standard-size bread; about 1 cup of breakfast cereal; or ½ cup of cooked rice, cereal or pasta.

The MyPyramid graphic also features a person climbing steps on one side of the pyramid. This emphasizes the importance of daily physical activity to balance daily food intake. Balancing food intake and physical activity requires at least 30 minutes of activity daily for most people. Preventing weight gain may require about 60 minutes of daily physical activity. Maintaining weight loss may increase that requirement to 90 minutes each day. *The important message is that weight control is a combination of eating appropriate amounts and kinds of foods plus getting adequate amounts of physical exercise. This message is especially important for children!* Preventing overweight in our children is one of the most important things we can do to help keep them healthy as they grow and develop.

The top of the pyramid tapers to a point for all of the food groups. The wider base stands for foods with little or no solid fats or added sugars. These foods should be selected more often than foods high in sugars, solid fats or salt. Solid fats to avoid are butter, lard, or shortening and the foods that contain these. Wise food shopping includes reading the Nutrition Facts labels on foods. These labels list many nutrients as well as the amount of two kinds of solid fats: saturated and trans fats.

By reading food labels before buying, you can avoid those foods and food products that contain excess amounts of saturated and trans fats, sugars and salt. Overeating foods

with excess solid fats and sugars can contribute to increased risk of developing obesity and heart disease. Choosing beverages low in sugar (water or fruit juice instead of sugared soft drinks); protein sources that are lean (fish and skinless chicken rather than hamburgers or high-fat steaks); and low-fat or fat-free milk and cheese products can save you hundreds of calories each day. Combine this calorie savings with increased physical activity and you have the best recipe for weight control.

Step up to good nutrition and health; try your Pyramid!

Wanda H. Howell, PhD, RD  
University Distinguished Professor  
Nutritional Sciences Department