

A Guide for Daily Food Choices

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Food and Nutrition Series | Health

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A varied and nutritious diet helps us stay healthy and productive. The body needs more than 40 nutrients: vitamins, minerals and water, as well as energy-providing protein, carbohydrates, and fats. No one food supplies all the essential nutrients in the amounts needed. Therefore, it is important to eat a variety of foods each day. (See fact sheet 9.353, *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.)

To help describe a varied diet, nutrition scientists and educators group foods by the nutrients they contain. The major groups are: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, and meat & beans (see Figure 1). A varied diet that contains foods from these groups each day provides the protein, vitamins, minerals, starch, and dietary fiber needed.

There is also a sixth group: fats and oils. Foods from this group mainly supply calories and have few vitamins and minerals. Limit their intake.

It is also wise to vary food choices within the main groups. Specific foods differ in the kinds and amounts of nutrients they provide. For example, include red meats, poultry, fish, and beans in a week's menu. Pick different breads, fruits, and vegetables as well. Be sure to include dark green leafy vegetables, orange vegetables, dry beans and peas, and whole-grain breads and cereals. These foods provide dietary fiber and nutrients that are low in many diets. (See Table 1.)

The amount of food you need depends on your age, gender, physical condition, and

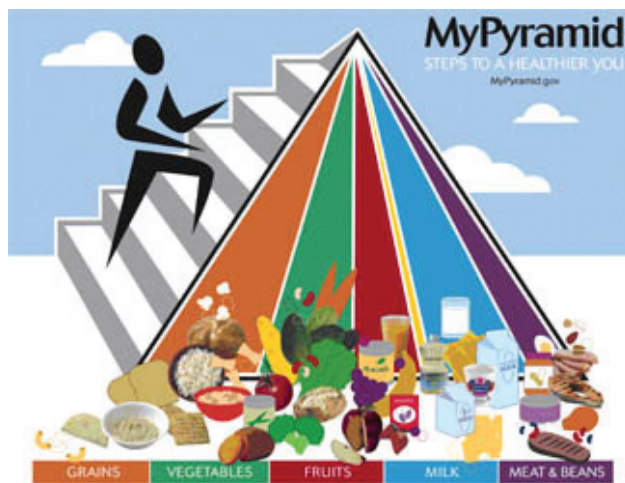
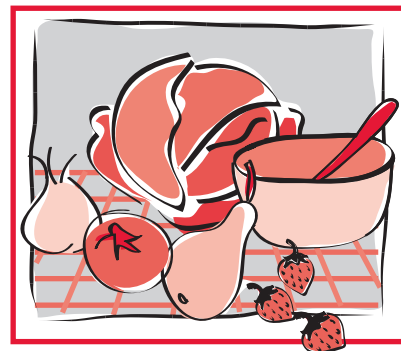


Figure 1: Food Guide Pyramid.

activity level. The amounts listed in Table 1 meet the nutrient needs of adults consuming a 2,000 calorie diet. Active and growing children and teenagers and active adults may need to consume more foods from each group. Young children may not need as much. They can have reduced amounts from all of the food groups. Children aged 2 to 8 should consume the equivalent of 2 cups of milk per day. For more information on various recommendation levels, visit the MyPyramid website at www.mypyramid.gov or refer to the MyPyramid Food Wheel (available through the University Resource Center).

Some people, such as vegetarians or vegans, may not eat one or more of these types of food. These people may wish to contact a dietitian or nutrition educator in their community to help answer questions about food choices. (Also see fact sheet 9.324, *Vegetarian Diets*.)



Quick Facts

- Choose a variety of foods daily from the five major food groups.
- Each day, strive to eat the suggested daily amounts for each group.
- Limit the total amount of food eaten to maintain a healthy weight.
- Emphasize food choices that are low in fat and sugars.
- Limit the intake of fats, oils, sweets, and alcoholic beverages.

See Table 1,
page 2.

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Table 1. A daily food guide – based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

Food Group	Suggested Daily Amounts	Guidelines for Amounts	Nutrients
GRAINS half your grains whole. Sources: * Breads * Cereals * Rice * Pasta * Other grain products	6 oz. from entire group Include 3 oz. of whole-grain products daily.	1 oz. is equivalent to: * 1 slice of bread * 1 small roll, biscuit, or muffin * 1/2 hamburger bun, bagel, or English muffin * 1/2 8-9 inch flour tortilla * 1 corn tortilla * 1/2 cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal * 1 oz. ready-to-eat cereal * 5 small or 2-3 large crackers	Enriched and whole-grain breads and cereals provide starch, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and iron. Whole grains also are good sources of fiber and provide folic acid, magnesium, and zinc.
VEGETABLES Vary your veggies. Sources: * Dark green, leafy varieties * Orange varieties * Dry beans and peas (legumes) * Starchy vegetables * Other vegetables	2 ½ cups from entire group. Include all types regularly; eat dark green, leafy and orange vegetables, and dry beans and peas several times a week.	1 cup is equivalent to: * 1 cup cooked or raw vegetables or legumes, * 2 cups raw leafy vegetables, such as lettuce or spinach * 1 cup vegetable juice	Dark green leafy vegetables are good sources of vitamins A and C, riboflavin, folic acid, calcium, magnesium, potassium, and fiber. Orange vegetables are excellent sources of vitamin A. Dry beans and peas are good sources of fiber, thiamin, folic acid, iron, phosphorus, zinc, potassium, protein, and starch. Other vegetables contain varying amounts of vitamins, minerals, and fiber.
FRUITS Focus on fruits. Sources: * Citrus fruits * Melons * Berries * Other fruit varieties	2 cups from entire group. Eat a variety of fruits; choose from fresh, frozen, dried, and canned; go easy on fruit juices.	1 cup is equivalent to: * 1 whole fruit such as a medium apple, orange, banana, or grapefruit * 1 cup berries * 1 cup cooked or canned fruit * 1/2 cup dried fruit * 1 cup 100% juice	All fruits are good sources of potassium, folic acid, magnesium, and fiber. Citrus fruits, melons, and berries are especially good sources of vitamin C. All yellow fruits are rich in vitamin A.
MILK Get your calcium-rich foods. Sources: * Milk * Cheese * Yogurt * Other calcium sources (fortified foods, tofu, sardines, dry beans, turnip or mustard greens)	3 cups from entire group; 2 cups for children aged 2-8. Choose low-fat or fat-free products; if you can not or do not consume dairy products, then choose lactose-free products or other calcium source products.	1 cup is equivalent to: * 1 cup milk * 8 oz. yogurt * 1 1/2 oz. natural cheese * 2 oz. processed cheese * 1/3 cup shredded cheese	Foods in this group are good sources of calcium, protein, riboflavin, vitamin B ₁₂ , thiamin and, if fortified, vitamin D. If you are unable to consume milk products, each of the following provides the amount of calcium present in 1 cup of milk: 1 cup calcium-fortified orange juice or soy milk, 1/2 cup calcium-processed tofu, 2 cups cooked dry beans, 1 1/2 cups cooked turnip or mustard greens.
MEAT AND BEANS Go lean with protein. Sources: * Meat * Fish * Poultry * Eggs * Dry Beans and peas * Nuts and seeds	5 ½ oz. from entire group. Choose low-fat or lean meats, fish, and poultry; vary your protein sources throughout the week.	1 oz. is equivalent to: * 1 oz. cooked weight of lean meat, fish, or poultry * 1/4 cup cooked dry beans * 1 egg * 1/4 cup tofu * 1/2 oz. nuts * 1 Tbsp peanut butter	Foods in this group are sources of many nutrients: protein, niacin, vitamins B ₆ and B ₁₂ , iron, phosphorus, and zinc.
FATS AND OILS Sources: * Butter * Margarine * Shortening * Animal Fats * Vegetable Oils * Nut Oils	Use sparingly. Choose vegetable oils, such as canola or olive oil; choose fat sources with no trans fats.		Oils provide essential fatty acids to the diet. Most people consume enough of these necessary nutrients through the fats and oils within the foods they eat. Added fats and oils should be used sparingly.

Adapted from: USDA's MyPyramid 2005, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (available at www.mypyramid.gov).