

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

Scaling the New Pyramid

THE NEW FOOD GUIDE PYRAMID offers personalized content based on your age, gender and activity level. To take advantage of the many consumer-friendly tools, visit www.mypyramid.gov, enter your information and start exploring page after page of nutrition recommendations based on your profile. This Web site goes way beyond the “two to four servings” type of recommendations; the new Pyramid offers such details as how many orange vegetables to eat each week and how many “discretionary calories” you’re allowed each day.

A Spectrum of Choices

The colored stripes that run from the bottom of the Pyramid up to its apex represent the spectrum of food choices available to us. Each stripe represents a food group, while the 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). The structure of this pyramid reminds us that all foods are O.K. in moderation and that excluding entire food groups is not the way to go. Instead, the USDA recommends that you eat a variety of foods and understand where each fits into a healthy diet.

No More Guessing on Serving Sizes

One of the more confusing aspects of the old Food Guide Pyramid was its use of

servings as a measure of food quantity. Many people simply could not remember 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 used measurable quantities like cups and ounces to create the new Pyramid, making it much more user-friendly.



Here’s an example of how the new Pyramid can be used as a tool for weight management. 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 Web site 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 six food groups.

Take the Time to Understand the Pyramid

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. And while the USDA still offers a poster-sized summary of its recommendations, this tool is made much more effective by its expansive Web site. 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.

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