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Senior Wellness Series

Food Choices for Healthy Aging

FACT SHEET 08-01



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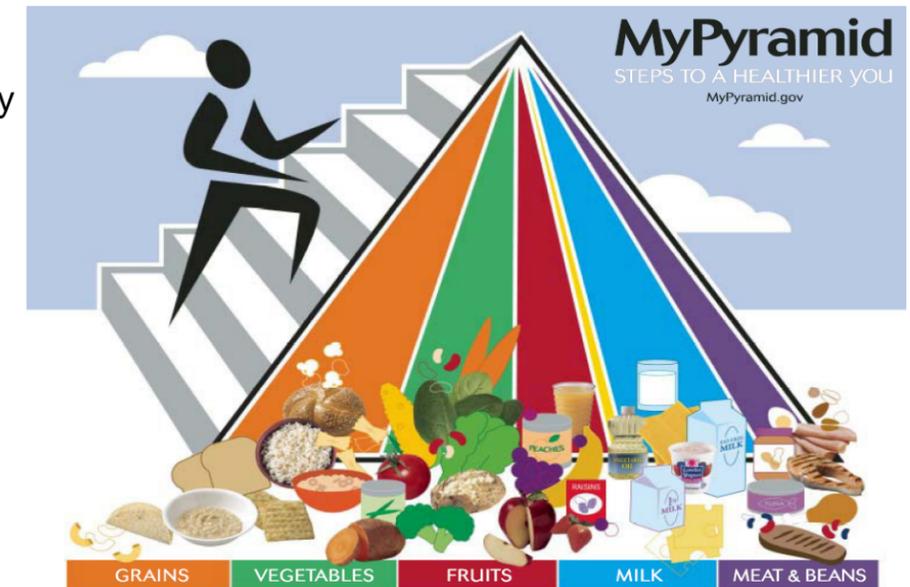
Food Choices for Healthy Aging



As we age, making healthy food choices and being physically active can help us feel better and improve our overall health and well-being. However, making these healthy food choices can be confusing as nutrition, what to eat and what not to eat, receives often conflicting daily news coverage in newspapers, books, magazines, and on television and talk shows. To better understand healthy eating as we age, focus on using the **3 Key Principles to Healthy Eating: Proportion, Moderation and Variety.**

Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 and MyPyramid

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are developed for health promotion, chronic disease prevention, and are the basis for federal nutrition education and programs, such as Meals on Wheels. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are set by a group of educators, nutritionists and scientists, along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. They are updated every few years as we learn more about human nutrition. The Guidelines also emphasize the value of a healthy body weight and that we should balance our food intake with physical activity to achieve or maintain a healthy weight.



The USDA has devised **MyPyramid** to better explain these recommendations. The food groups are shown in a pyramid to help us understand the relative amounts of foods from each group we should consume each day.

Key Principle #1: Choose foods in the right Proportion

To better understand this principle it is important to be familiar with food categories and recommended number of daily servings from each. **We need to eat the "right amount" of foods from five food categories to be healthy:** grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, meat and beans. Daily caloric intake and serving size will need to be adjusted for individuals based on factors such as age, gender, body weight and activity levels.

To estimate your individual calorie needs go to www.mypyramid.gov.



The **recommended daily number of servings**, from each food group, for the **average 2000 calorie diet** include:

- ▶ **Make half your grains whole.** From this group we find foods high in fiber and include breads, rice, cereal, pasta and crackers. The general guidelines state that we should have **6 oz.** from this category each day. How to count:

1 oz. = 1 slice of bread, ½ cup cooked pasta/rice, 1 cup of breakfast cereal, 3 cups of popcorn OR 5 whole wheat crackers

Helpful tip: 1 muffin = a light bulb, 1 pancake = a hockey puck or CD

- ▶ **Vary your veggies. Focus on fruits.** The general recommendation for these vitamin, mineral and fiber rich foods are **2 ½ cups of vegetables** every day and **2 cups of fruit** every day. How to count:

1 cup = 1 small apple/1 large banana, 1 cup raw/cooked veggies, 1 cup of fruit, 2 cups leafy greens, 1 cup 100 % juice OR ½ cup of dried fruit

Helpful tip: 1 medium size fruit = a tennis ball

Notice that if we look at the first three pyramid groups, we can see that the majority of the foods we should be eating each day are grains, vegetables and fruits. Notice also that these foods are from plants, not animals.

- ▶ **Get your calcium rich foods.** The **milk** group consists of calcium-rich foods like milk, yogurt, and cheeses. If possible choose low-fat or fat-free milk products. For those who are lactose intolerant, fortified soy milk, Lactaid®* or rice milk are good substitutes. The recommendations are **3 cups** each day from the milk group. How to count:

1 cup = 1 cup of milk, 1 - 8 oz. container of yogurt, 1 ½ oz. of natural cheese, 2 cups of cottage cheese OR 1 ½ cups of ice cream

Helpful tip: 1 ½ oz. of cheese = 2 dominoes

- ▶ **Go lean with protein.** Protein foods include meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs and nuts. Choose low-fat or lean meats and poultry while including more fish, beans, peas, nuts and seeds. It is recommended we eat **5 ½ oz.** every day. How to count:

1 oz. = 1 oz. of lean meat/poultry/fish, ¼ cup of cooked dry beans, ½ oz. of nuts or seeds, 1 egg OR 1 tbsp. of peanut butter

Helpful tip: 3 oz. of cooked meat, poultry, fish = a deck of playing cards

- ▶ **Oils** are fats that are liquid at room temperature. Most Americans consume enough oil in the foods they are already eating; such as nuts, fish, cooking oils and salad dressings. No more than 5-6 teaspoons of oil are recommended.

Remember, these amounts are based on a 2000 calorie diet. To find the right amount for you visit www.mypyramid.gov.

Key Principle #2: Choose Foods in Moderation

- ▶ Choose foods lower in **sodium and sugar** like a “low sodium” soup or a “less sugar” ice cream. For more flavor try lemon juice, extracts, vinegar, or add herbs and spices.
- ▶ **Alcohol** in moderation is defined as no more than one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men. What counts as one drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, 1.5 ounces of 80 proof spirits.
- ▶ Choose a diet low in **fat, particularly saturated fat**. You don’t need to count fat grams with MyPyramid if you make low fat choices from all the groups and use oils sparingly (this will be close to the recommended 30% daily fat intake).
- ▶ Choose foods containing less **cholesterol**. Dietary cholesterol comes from animal sources such as egg yolks, meat, poultry, fish and higher fat milk products. Aim for the daily recommendation level of no more than 300 mg.
- ▶ Avoid foods with **trans fatty acids**. These are found in foods that list “partially hydrogenated” oils on their ingredients. These types of fat, found in hard margarine, fried foods, many bakery products and some packed foods, are linked to heart disease.

Key Principle #3: Choose a Variety of Foods

It is important to choose a variety of foods not just from each food group but also, throughout the day. A half cup of broccoli does not have exactly the same vitamins and minerals as half cup of corn, and a serving of rice and a muffin don’t have the same nutrients. Eat a variety of foods to obtain the whole range of nutrients that you can get within each particular group.

How many calories do I need? As people get older, they don’t need as many calories per day as they once did though this depends on age, gender, and activity level. However, older people’s need for nutrients does not decrease and may actually increase. Therefore it is important to select foods that have a high nutritional value - foods that provide lots of nutrition for the calories taken in.

Can I still enjoy some of my favorite foods? “All foods can fit” so you can still enjoy some of your favorite foods. You should eat those foods in moderation (a piece of pie, not a whole pie). Then balance them by making low-fat and low sugar choices in the other foods you eat that day.

What about “special diets”? You should be aware that this is general information for the average older adult. If your doctor or dietitian has put you on a special diet due to a medical condition, it’s important to follow it. You can ask them about the MyPyramid recommendations, but don’t make changes in your diet without consulting with your doctor or dietitian if you are on a diet for medical reasons.

