



**MyPyramid.gov**  
STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOU

# MyPyramid 101

# Questions & Answers

## ***What is MyPyramid?***

MyPyramid replaces the old Food Guide Pyramid. MyPyramid is a consumer-friendly guide to help all healthy people over 2 years of age make healthful food choices. It is meant to be flexible and easy to use.

## ***What is MyPyramid based on?***

MyPyramid is based on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005* and represents the most current scientific information about diet and physical activity. The Dietary Guidelines answer the questions: What should Americans eat, how should we prepare our food to keep it safe and wholesome, and how should we be active to be healthy? The guidelines are designed to help Americans choose diets that will meet nutrient requirements, promote health, support active lives and reduce the risks of chronic disease. The Dietary Guidelines are the foundation of MyPyramid.

## ***What does the MyPyramid symbol represent?***

The MyPyramid symbol represents two key aspects of good health – healthful eating and physical activity.

Each of the colors in the pyramid represents one of the five food groups from which to choose for good health:

- **Orange** for grains
- **Green** for vegetables
- **Red** for fruits
- **Blue** for milk
- **Purple** for meat and beans

Between the blue and purple sections is a yellow band that represents oils – not a food group but a reminder that some oils are important for good health.

The person climbing the steps on the MyPyramid graphic represents physical activity. It is important to be active most or all days of the week.

## ***What key messages does MyPyramid convey?***

There are several key points that the symbol is meant to show:

**Gradual improvement** – The MyPyramid slogan, Steps to a Healthier You, reinforces that it takes small steps to improve your diet and lifestyle.

**Variety** – No one food can give us good health. Foods from all of the different colors are needed every day.

**Moderation** – Each band of color is wider at the bottom of the pyramid and narrower at the top. The wider base is where foods with little or no solid fats, added sugars or caloric sweeteners are found. Examples of these foods are whole wheat bread, fresh fruit and low-fat milk. These foods contain the most nutrients for the amount of calories they contain. Foods at the top, where the band narrows, contain fewer nutrients for their calories because they are higher in fat and sugar (for example, cookies and french fries). Most Americans need to moderate their diets by eating foods from the top of the pyramid less often.

**Proportionality** – Each color band is a different width. The orange band (the grain group) is widest, meaning that we should choose more foods from the grain group than from the other food groups. Remember that the widths are a general guide, not exact proportions.

### ***What is new about MyPyramid?***

In addition to the new symbol, there is new information for you:

The importance of physical activity is reinforced by the figure climbing the stairs.

- Whole grains now have a specific recommendation – make half your grains whole.
- There are more specific vegetable recommendations. More dark green and orange vegetables are encouraged. For the first time, there is a recommended amount of legumes, such as beans, peas and lentils, and other vegetables to eat in a week.
- Fruit is good for you, but go easy on fruit juice. Juice contains more sugar and calories and less fiber than whole fruit.
- Information about discretionary calories or “extras” like solid fat, added sugar and alcohol is provided.
- The tip of the pyramid (fats, oils and sweets) is gone. Instead, one of the color bands in MyPyramid is yellow, reminding people that some oils are important for good health. A person’s allowance for these oils is based on age, sex and activity level. Most people get enough oil in the foods they eat.

### ***Why are servings not used on MyPyramid?***

Based on research conducted by USDA, consumers prefer household servings like cups for the milk, fruit and vegetable groups. Ounces are used for grains and meat and beans.

### ***Is the calcium recommendation enough for some age groups?***

The number of cups of milk and calcium-rich foods recommended in MyPyramid is based on the recent Daily Reference Intakes (DRIs) from the Institute of Medicine.

Remember that we get calcium from other foods – about 300 milligrams a day, or the same amount of calcium in 1 cup of milk – when we eat a mixed diet of foods from food groups other than the milk group.

### ***Why were changes made to the old Food Guide Pyramid?***

The latest research about the American diet indicates it is not balanced. Most Americans don’t get enough dark green and orange vegetables and legumes, fruits, whole grains and low-fat milk products. Too many Americans eat more fats and added sugars than is healthy. MyPyramid addresses these shortfalls. Poor diet and not enough physical activity are linked to diseases like diabetes, osteoporosis, high blood pressure and some cancers. MyPyramid was updated to reflect the most current scientific research contained in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005*, released in January 2005

### ***Why is there no recommendation for the amount of water to drink daily?***

There is currently no Daily Reference Intake (DRI) for water. Thirst and normal consumption of drinks, especially with meals, is enough to provide the water our bodies need.

### ***What MyPyramid materials are available on the Web?***

At [MyPyramid.gov](http://MyPyramid.gov) you will find interactive Web activities that will help consumers get personalized daily eating plans.

- Click on “Tour MyPyramid” to view a short (about two minutes) video stream about the new pyramid.
- Click on “Mini-Poster” to download a two-page color MyPyramid handout.
- Click on “Inside The Pyramid” to get in-depth information about each food group, including daily amounts in household measures like cups and ounces along with examples and tips.
- Click on “Tips & Resources” for tips and resources and a worksheet to track what you are eating.
- Click on “My Pyramid Tracker” to get more detailed information on the quality of your diet and physical activity by comparing your daily food intake with current recommendations. Messages tailored to your needs are provided.
- Click on “My Pyramid Plan” to get a quick estimate of what and how much food you should eat from different food groups by entering age, gender and activity level.
- Click on “For Professionals” to get a Food Tracking work sheet to help you plan what you will eat and how much activity you will get each day. You can use this work sheet to set new goals for good health.
- From the “Tips & Resources” section, click on “Physical Activity” for more information about being active.

### ***Can I use MyPyramid if I am a vegetarian?***

Yes. From [MyPyramid.gov](http://MyPyramid.gov), click on “Inside The Pyramid” and click on the purple color band (meats and beans) to learn more about this group. Click on “Vegetarian Choices” for tips and ideas about vegetarian diets.

### **Assigning food to food groups**

#### ***Where do candy bars, pop and other sweets go?***

These foods are considered discretionary calories. Other examples of discretionary calories are foods that are higher in fat or sugar than their low-fat or low-sugar counterparts. For example, whole milk would be considered a food with discretionary calories. Choosing low-fat milk would provide you the essential nutrients you need with minimum calories. Choosing whole milk also provides you essential nutrients, but with more calories from the fat it contains.

#### ***How do you count mixed or combination foods, such as pizza?***

Many foods don’t fit into one food group. Pizza contains ingredients from the grains group (crust), vegetable group (tomato sauce) and milk group (cheese topping).

#### ***Why do legumes count in two groups — vegetables and meat and beans?***

Vegetables are put into five subgroups based on their nutrient content. One of these subgroups is dried beans, beans and legumes. Choosing vegetables from this group will increase the amount of fiber in your diet. You may also choose to eat dry beans and peas and count them as foods from the meat and beans group to get the protein you need.

However, if you count legumes towards your meat and beans group needs, do not count them again as dry beans and peas for your vegetable group needs.

***What pyramid messages have not changed?***

The recommendations regarding food safety and alcohol have not changed.

**Mixed Dishes**

(Values are estimated based on how these foods are prepared.)

<b>Food &amp; Portion</b>	<b>Grains Group (ounce equivalents)</b>	<b>Vegetable Group (cups)</b>	<b>Fruit Group (cups)</b>	<b>Milk Group (cups)</b>	<b>Meat &amp; Beans Group (ounce equivalents)</b>	<b>Estimated Total Calories</b>
Cheese pizza (1 slice from medium, thin crust pizza)	1	1/8		1/2		215
Lasagna (3 1/2 by 4-inch piece)	2	1/2		1	1	445
Macaroni & cheese (1 cup made from packaged mix)	2			1/2		260
Tuna noodle casserole (1 cup)	1 1/2			1/2	2	260
Chicken pot pie (8 ounces)	2 1/2	1/4			1 1/2	500
Beef tacos (2)	2 1/2	1/4		1/4	2	370
Bean & cheese burrito (1)	2 1/2	1/8		1	2	445
Egg roll (1)	1/2	1/8			1/2	150
Chicken fried rice (1 cup)	1 1/2	1/4			1	270
Stuffed peppers with rice & meat (1/2 pepper)	1/2	1/2			1	190
Beef stir-fry (1 cup)		3/4			1 1/2	267
Clam chowder-New England style (1 cup)	1/2	1/8		1/2	2	165

Food & Portion	Grains Group (ounce equivalents)	Vegetable Group (cups)	Fruit Group (cups)	Milk Group (cups)	Meat & Beans Group (ounce equivalents)	Estimated Total Calories
Clam chowder-Manhattan style, chunky (1 cup)		$\frac{3}{8}$			2	135
Cream of tomato soup (1 cup)	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$		$\frac{1}{2}$		160
Large cheeseburger	2			$\frac{1}{3}$	3	500
Turkey sub sandwich (6 inches long)	2	$\frac{1}{2}$		$\frac{1}{4}$	2	320
Peanut butter & jelly sandwich (1)	2				2	375
Tuna salad sandwich (1)	2	$\frac{1}{4}$			2	290
Chef' salad (3 cups, no dressing)		$1 \frac{1}{2}$			3	230
Pasta salad with vegetables (1 cup)	$1 \frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$				140
Apple pie (1 slice)	2		$\frac{1}{4}$			280
Pumpkin pie (1 slice)	$1 \frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{8}$		$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	240

This material was adapted from the University of Missouri Extension.

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