

# Tools for Planning Quality Meals

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# What is Good Nutrition?

We all know generally what nutrition is. It is the process by which our bodies take in and use food. But why is it so important?

What is good nutrition?

**Good nutrition is having the calories we need for energy and the nutrients essential for:**

- proper growth, repair, and maintenance of body tissues.
- resistance to disease and infection.
- prevention of deficiencies that lead to problems such as anemia, goiter, scurvy, and rickets.

In recent decades, medical researchers have found that good nutrition can also help reduce the risks of coronary heart diseases and certain types of cancer.

**While we can sometimes get by with less than an optimum diet, to thrive we need a healthy diet.**

**A healthy diet provides:**

- essential nutrients and energy to prevent nutritional deficiencies and excesses.
- the right balance of carbohydrate, fat, and protein to reduce risks for chronic disease.
- a variety of foods, including plenty of grains, vegetables, and fruits.

# Nutrients Needed for Growth and Development

Many different nutrients are needed for good health. These include carbohydrates, fat, protein, vitamins, minerals, and water. Most foods contain more than one nutrient. And some foods provide more nutrients than others.

## **The best strategy? Choose a variety of foods.**

To include the greatest amount of nutrients and meet the recommendations of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, choose a variety of foods for each meal throughout the week.

A perfect food with all essential nutrients does not exist. A food may be a good source of some vitamins and minerals, but still lack other important ones. By regularly serving a variety of foods, you will help children learn healthy food habits. You will also help make sure the children will not become bored with the foods you offer them.



# Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are our most important source of energy. Carbohydrates come from many sources and are made up of two different types: simple carbohydrates and complex carbohydrates.

## ■ What do simple carbohydrates provide?

Simple carbohydrates (for example, the sugars which are found in milk and fruit) provide our bodies with energy that goes to work for our bodies right away.

## ■ What do complex carbohydrates provide?

Complex carbohydrates give a longer lasting form of energy. Foods rich in complex carbohydrates come from grains (pasta, breads, and cereals), vegetables, and legumes (dried beans and peas).

## ■ How much of the foods we eat should be carbohydrates?

Our daily diets need to include foods that provide simple carbohydrates and foods that provide complex carbohydrates. Over half of the foods we eat should be from these foods.

# Protein

Protein is needed for building new tissue and forming new cells. The body can also use protein as a source of energy.

## ■ What are sources of protein?

Meat is a good source of protein along with milk, eggs, yogurt, and cheese. Other protein sources are grains and legumes, which are also rich in complex carbohydrates.

Serving meat alternatives should be considered because of the amount of fat we find in meats and often because of how these foods are prepared for eating.

### ■ What does protein contribute to a child's health?

Protein is needed to help children grow. When a child is sick, the body needs protein to get well. Protein will help the body fight off germs. If a child falls and breaks a bone or scrapes a knee, protein will be used to repair the body.

Too little protein in the diet can stop a child from growing or learning. Excess protein may be used by the body for energy or stored as body fat.

## Fat

Fat is the most concentrated energy source in the diet. It provides more than twice as many calories per gram as either proteins or carbohydrates.

Fats are made of fatty acids. Fatty acids are required for brain development, vision, and the formation of some hormones. Fatty acids may be “saturated” or “unsaturated.”

### ■ What are *saturated* fats?

Fats that are made up mostly of saturated fatty acids are called saturated fats. Saturated fats cause our bodies to make cholesterol and can lead to heart disease.

Saturated fats come mainly from animal foods, such as fatty meats, whole milk, and whole milk products. It is important to offer children lean meats and lowfat or reduced-fat milk, cheese, and yogurt.

### ■ Why should a child's diet include some fat?

Fats give children the extra energy they need to play hard by supplying muscles with special long-lasting fuel. Unlike adults, most children have very little fat stored in their bodies (this is because of their greater energy needs for growth and activity).

### ■ What are some tips about fat?

Children need the constant supply of concentrated energy available in fat. This does not mean that children need high fat diets, but it does mean we need to:

- make whole milk available for toddlers (children under 2 years old).
- make reduced-fat or lowfat (not nonfat, skim, or fat-free) milk available for preschoolers.

While we want to limit fried foods and foods high in fat, especially saturated fat, we have to be careful not to restrict all fats from children's diets.

## Vitamins

Vitamins are organic substances needed by the body in very small amounts. Many chemical reactions in the body depend on vitamins. They help release energy from carbohydrates, fats, and proteins.

### ■ What foods contain vitamins A, D, E, and K?

Vitamins A, D, E, and K are four important vitamins. They are fat-soluble. These vitamins are found in colorful fruits and vegetables and in foods containing fats and oils, such as dairy products.

While meeting children's needs for all these vitamins is important, children's diets are most often low in vitamin A.

### ■ What foods contain vitamin C and B complex vitamins?

The remaining vitamins (vitamin C and B complex vitamins) are water-soluble. Vitamin C is found mostly in fruits and vegetables. Vitamin B is found in meats and milk as well as in fruits, vegetables, and grains.

# Minerals

Minerals are needed in small amounts and are used for many purposes, including building strong bones and teeth and making hemoglobin in red blood cells. They also maintain body fluids and chemical reactions.

## ■ What are some examples of minerals?

Examples of minerals include calcium, iodine, iron, magnesium, potassium, sodium, and zinc.

# Water

Water is an important part of an adequate diet. Water is needed to replace the body water lost in urine and sweat. It helps transport nutrients, remove wastes, and regulate body temperature.

## ■ Why do we need to offer water frequently to children?

Young children may get busy and forget to drink enough water, especially in hot weather. Encourage toddlers and preschoolers to consume water by offering it frequently during the day.

### **For more information, see Appendix D.**

Appendix D is a helpful resource. It lists these major nutrients and tells you more about what each contributes to growth, development, and good health. It also lists food sources.

# The Dietary Guidelines for Americans

The best way to provide healthy food choices for children is to apply the messages of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* to your menus and food items.

The Dietary Guidelines are a set of recommendations designed for healthy Americans ages 2 years and older. They do not apply to infants and toddlers under the age of 2 years.

## ■ What is the purpose of the Dietary Guidelines?

The Dietary Guidelines answer the basic question: “How should Americans eat to stay healthy?”

They reflect the best available scientific and medical knowledge about food choices that promote health and help prevent chronic diseases.

## ■ Who publishes the Dietary Guidelines?

The Dietary Guidelines are published jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Every 5 years, the Guidelines are reviewed by a panel of experts to determine whether the existing standards should be altered and, if so, recommend changes.



### ■ What do the Dietary Guidelines recommend?

*Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (Fourth Edition, 1995) recommends the following. As explained above, these are recommendations designed for people 2 years old and older—not infants or toddlers under the age of 2 years.

1. **Eat a variety of foods.**
2. **Balance the food you eat with physical activity—maintain or improve your weight.**
3. **Choose a diet with plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits.**
4. **Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.**
5. **Choose a diet moderate in sugars.**
6. **Choose a diet moderate in salt and sodium.**
7. **If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.**

**The Dietary Guidelines emphasize *moderation*. They are meant to be applied over a period of time, not to one food or one meal.**

Following the Dietary Guidelines is a great way to have a healthy diet so that we can have healthier and more active lives, and reduce the risk of chronic disease. It is important to remember that these guidelines are meant to be applied to a diet over a period of time, not to one food or one meal. They call for moderation and the avoidance of extremes in the diet. On the following pages, we will look at each of the guidelines in more detail.

## Eat a variety of foods

Eating a variety of foods is the cornerstone of a healthy diet. Why is this true? Here are some important reasons:

- Foods contain combinations of nutrients and other healthy substances. No one food provides all the nutrients needed for good health.
- To make sure we consume all of the nutrients and other substances needed for health, we need to choose a variety of foods.
- There are no “good” or “bad” foods. All foods can be part of a healthy diet if balance and moderation are achieved.

### *As you plan meals for children...*

**Keep in mind that it is important to obtain nutrients from a variety of foods, not from a few highly fortified foods or supplements.**

**This is because:**

- Serving a variety of foods is the best way to provide children with adequate calories as well as nutrients.
- Relying on fortified foods or supplements may limit the nutrients in meals served to children.
- There are some substances in foods—particularly in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains—for which requirements and functions have not yet been established, even though our bodies need and use them. A varied diet will help avoid shortages of these substances as well as others.

## Menu Planning Tips for Variety

### *Main Dishes*

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- Plan a different meat or meat alternate for each day in the week.
- Use a variety of meat or meat alternates, such as eggs, turkey sausage, ham, beef, lowfat cheese, lowfat yogurt, peanut butter, refried beans, etc.

### *Vegetables and Fruits*

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- Serve seasonal fresh fruits/vegetables whenever possible.
- Include raw or cooked fruits and/or vegetables in salads.
- Plan to use raw or cooked fruits in fruit cups and desserts.
- Use a different combination of two or more servings of vegetables and fruits each day. Include all forms—fresh, canned, frozen, and dried.
- Serve a variety of full-strength fruit or vegetable juices such as: apple, grape, pineapple-orange, pineapple-grapefruit, orange, and tomato.
- Include foods that are high in vitamin A and vitamin C.
- Plan to include vegetables and fruits frequently in snacks.

### *Grains and Breads*

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- Plan to use a different kind of grain/bread each day.
- In main and side dishes, include a variety of enriched rice, macaroni, noodles, and other pasta products. Serve brown rice as well as white rice.
- Serve loaf breads or hot breads, such as rolls, sandwich buns, muffins, biscuits, or cornbread as often as possible.
- Look for more opportunities to use whole grains in recipes and menus.

- Serve Spanish rice with tacos or burritos.
- Serve whole-wheat crackers or cornbread with chili.
- Use whole-grain flours to enhance flavors and increase fiber.
- Use a variety of hot and cold cereals. Look for cereals that supply fiber and contain moderate amounts of sugar and salt.
- Include several whole-grain cereals and breads each week.
- Limit your use of sweet grains/breads at breakfast and at snacks.

## **Milk**

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- Serve whole milk as a beverage and/or on cereal to toddlers (children between 12 months and 2 years of age).
- Serve lowfat milk as a beverage and/or on cereal to children 2 years of age and older.

# Balance the food you eat with physical activity—maintain or improve your weight

Children need enough food for proper growth and normal development. Calorie needs of children differ due to body size, growth spurts, and levels of physical activity.

Obesity in childhood is a growing problem in our nation. A poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle are the major contributors.

Health professionals recommend that childhood obesity be prevented by increasing physical activity. They also recommend teaching children to eat grains, vegetables, fruits, as well as lowfat dairy foods and other protein-rich foods.

## *Staying active helps children...*

**Physical activity is essential for everyone. It is important to encourage children to get in the habit of exercise at a young age.**

**Physical activity helps children have fun and maintain a healthy weight. It also helps them...**

- develop strong muscles.
- develop a healthy heart and lungs.
- have strong bones.
- develop motor skills, balance, and coordination.
- develop positive attitudes.
- improve their self-esteem.



## ***How can you help children be active?***

**Regular physical activity is important to maintaining health. It burns calories, helps with weight control, and helps prevent certain diseases later in life.**

**While physical activity is not a CACFP requirement, at least 30 to 45 minutes of physical activity will give the children in your care a healthy boost each day. Here are some things you might do:**

- Encourage outdoor play.
- Promote active play, noncompetitive sports, and games, such as running games, tag, jumping, hide and seek, throwing and catching, kickball, and hand toss.
- Plan lively activities that children love, such as musical chairs and other traditional favorites like *Duck, Duck, Goose*; *London Bridge*; *Red Light, Green Light*; and *Simon Says*.
- Demonstrate how to do exercises like sit-ups and jumping jacks.
- Plan to take children on outside walks, such as before mealtime.
- Limit the amount of time children spend watching television and playing games on the computer.



## Menu Planning Tips for Maintaining Healthy Weight

**The more physical activity we get, the more energy we use. Encourage physical activity—and be sure to provide the calories children need to be active.**

- Serve plenty of vegetables and fruits.
- Serve more pasta, rice, breads, and cereals without fats and sugars added in preparation or at the table.
- Serve less fat and fewer high-fat foods.
- Limit cookies and sweets to no more than two times per week.





## Choose a diet with plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits

Most of the calories in a diet should come from grain products, vegetables, and fruits. These foods provide vitamins, minerals, complex carbohydrates (starch and dietary fiber), and other substances that are important for good health. They are usually low in fat, depending on how they are prepared.

Researchers continue to study the role of fiber in healthy diets and in decreasing the risk of chronic diseases. Some of the benefits associated with a high-fiber diet come from other components present in these foods, not just from fiber itself. Therefore, fiber is best obtained from foods rather than supplements.





## Menu Planning Tips for Increasing Grains, Vegetables, and Fruits

### *Main Dishes*

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- Try serving vegetarian baked beans, beans and rice, bean burrito, lentil or split pea soup, or other vegetarian main dishes for variety. Keep in mind that cooked dry beans or peas can be used as a meat alternate or as a vegetable but not as both in the same meal.
- Use green peppers, mushrooms, zucchini, and onions as pizza toppings. Add spinach or broccoli to lasagna.
- Serve submarine sandwiches on whole-wheat rolls.
- Serve a variety of hot and cold pasta salads.
- Increase proportion of grains to other ingredients. For example, serve a thicker pizza crust.
- Add grains such as pre-cooked rice and oats to ground beef in meat loaf and similar casseroles. Use bulgur or barley to thicken soups.

### *Vegetables and Fruits*

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- Serve vegetables higher in fiber, such as cooked dry beans, broccoli, tomatoes, leafy greens, potatoes with skin, and carrots.
- Serve raw vegetable salads.
- Serve vegetarian baked beans or other bean dishes, such as black-eyed peas and lowfat refried beans.
- Serve fresh fruits higher in fiber, such as those with edible skins—like apples, pears, nectarines, peaches—and those with edible seeds, such as berries and bananas.
- Serve fresh fruits and vegetables as finger foods.
- Try combining two or three fruits or vegetables to contrast colors and textures (carrot and celery sticks, for example, or grape halves and peach slices). Serve colorful fruit or vegetable cups often.
- Season vegetables with herbs for taste appeal.
- Include vegetables and fruits often in snacks.

## Grains and Breads

- Serve quick breads, muffins, crackers, or cookies made with whole grains or whole-grain flours. (Examples of whole-grain flours include cornmeal, masa, whole-wheat flour, oats, bulgur, and barley.)
- Substitute whole-wheat flour for part of the white flour in recipes. When introducing whole grains, try starting with 10 percent whole-grain flour or grains. Gradually increase the amount each time the recipe is prepared.
- Make oat flour by grinding oatmeal in a blender. You can use oat flour with other flours for breading, baking, and thickening sauces.
- Use rice, noodles, oats, cornmeal, or bulgur in main dishes or in side dishes, such as salads, hot grains, and desserts.
- Serve a variety of pasta salads.
- Plan a variety of whole-grain breads and cereals at breakfast and for snacks.
- Serve sandwiches with one slice of whole-wheat bread and one slice of white bread. This is a good way to introduce children to whole-wheat bread.



## Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol

In general, health professionals believe that food habits established in childhood are important in preventing heart disease later in life. They recommend reducing the risk of heart disease by decreasing the amount of total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol in the diet.

*However, we must remember that advice in the Dietary Guidelines about limiting fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol does not apply to infants and toddlers below the age of 2 years.*

In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics states, “No restriction should be placed on the fat and cholesterol content of the diets of infants less than 2 years...” The first 2 years of a child’s life, as the Academy explains, is a time “when rapid growth and development require high energy intakes.”

### ■ What is recommended for children over the age of 2 years?

The Dietary Guidelines recommend that children over the age of 2 years should *gradually* adopt a diet that, by about 5 years of age, contains no more than 30 percent of calories from fat.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, concerned that some individuals may “over-interpret” the need to limit children’s fat intakes, has also recommended that children’s diets contain no less than 20 percent of total calories from fat.

### ■ What are the best ways to gradually reduce fat in children’s diets?

Changes to reduce the amount and type of fat in meals must be practical and acceptable, with children learning to enjoy a wide variety of foods.

As children begin to consume fewer calories from fat, they should replace these calories by eating more grain products, vegetables, fruits, lowfat milk products or other calcium-rich foods, and beans, lean meat, poultry, fish, or other protein-rich foods.

## Menu Planning Tips for Reducing Fat

### Main Dishes

- Choose entrees that can be prepared without added fat. Bake, broil, or boil instead of fry. Trim fat from meats.
- Serve lean meats, fish, poultry, as well as cooked dry beans, dry peas, and lentils. Consider serving dishes that combine meat or meat alternates with grains—beans and rice, for example.
- Be careful when selecting pre-cooked breaded meats, fish, or poultry. These products may contain excess fat. Check fat content and select those products that are lower in fat and bake rather than fry them.
- Use sparingly processed meat items such as lunch meat and hot dogs. These items are generally higher in fat.
- Serve cooked dry beans or canned beans in main dishes like chili, burritos, and tostadas.
- Use part-skim mozzarella cheese and lowfat cottage or ricotta cheese in recipes listing cheese as an ingredient.
- Drain all meat after cooking.
- To lower saturated fat, cut the fat in recipes by one-fourth or one-third without losing the great taste. See Appendix E for suggestions on how to trim the fat when cooking, baking, sautéing, stir-frying, and deep-fat cooking.



### Vegetables and Fruits

- Serve reduced-fat salad dressings.
- Balance higher fat foods in menus with items lower in fat. For example, with chicken nuggets serve baked potatoes or steamed fresh vegetables rather than french fries.
- Steam, simmer, or bake vegetables without adding butter or other fats.
- Season vegetables with herbs, spices, salsa, or lemon juice.
- Serve fresh fruit.

- Substitute plain lowfat yogurt for part of the mayonnaise or creamy salad dressings in salads.
- Serve fresh vegetable strips with lowfat yogurt dip, salsa, or lowfat salad dressing.
- Use non-stick cooking spray when sautéing or baking potato wedges.
- Use fruit purees, such as prune puree or apple-sauce, in place of up to half of the fat in some baked goods.
- Prepare fruits and vegetables used in recipes without adding fat.



## Grains and Breads

- Plan menus that contain a variety of lower fat grain products, such as bagels, English muffins, and pita bread.
- Serve jam or jelly on bread and rolls in place of high fat spreads.
- Use only a moderate amount of high-fat condiments like butter or regular mayonnaise on bread and rolls. Instead, use lowfat mayonnaise, mustard, catsup, and vegetable relishes such as salsa.
- Serve a variety of lowfat grain products—such as noodles, brown rice, barley, and bulgur—prepared with little or no added fat.
- Make or buy lowfat baking mixes.
- Use a non-stick cooking spray to grease baking pans.
- Use vegetable oil or fruit purees instead of butter, lard, or shortening.



## Milk

- Serve lowfat (such as 1 percent) milk to children 2 years of age and older to help decrease the fat content of meals.



## Purchasing Tips for Reducing Fat

### When purchasing *fats, oils, or salad dressings*...

- Revise purchase orders to prohibit saturated vegetable oils, such as coconut oil, palm oil, palm kernel oil, and hydrogenated shortening or stick-type margarine.
- Purchase soft margarine, which is lower in saturated fat than stick margarine.
- Purchase lower fat salad dressings. Try newest versions of lowfat mayonnaise, especially for use in salads or salad dressing mixes.

### When purchasing *milk*...

- Purchase lowfat milk and other lowfat dairy products for children 2 years of age and older.

### When purchasing *entrees*...

- Review the prepared entree products you purchase to determine if good quality, lower fat products are available.

### When purchasing *meat*...

- Purchase ground chicken or turkey (without skin) to mix with lean ground beef.
- Purchase leaner meats (such as ground beef with no more than 15 percent fat).
- Purchase tuna packed in water instead of oil.
- Purchase reduced-fat processed meats, such as reduced-fat frankfurters and deli-meats.

### When purchasing *fruits and vegetables*...

- Purchase oven-ready french fries instead of fries for deep-fat frying.

### When purchasing *grains and breads*...

- Purchase lower fat variety breads (such as bagels, pita bread, pancakes, flour tortillas, English muffins, etc.) to serve more frequently instead of higher fat grain products such as croissants, donuts, and sweet rolls.



## Choose a diet moderate in sugars

Offer and use sugars in moderation. Sugars and many foods that contain them in large amounts supply calories, but they may be limited in vitamins and minerals. Eating sugars can lead to tooth decay, especially when eaten between meals.

Foods contain sugars in various forms. Read ingredient labels for clues on sugar content. If one or more of the following words appears first or several times on the label, then the food probably contains a large amount of sugar: *sugar, sucrose, glucose, maltose, dextrose, lactose, fructose, honey, fruit juice, syrups*.



## Menu Planning Tips for Using Less Sugar

- Use seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables when possible. Avoid adding sugar or honey to fresh fruits.
- Use fruits packed in light syrup or juice. These will be sweet, so there is no need to add extra sugar.
- Do not add sugar to vegetables such as stewed tomatoes, corn, or green beans.
- Use fresh or frozen fruits in snacks.
- Limit your use of sweet snacks and sweet breakfast foods. Use cereals that are not sugar-coated. If children are reluctant to give up higher sugared cereals, mix a small amount of the higher sugar cereals with the non-sugary cereals.
- Modify recipes for sweet snacks and sweet breakfast items to reduce sugar without compromising quality.





## Choose a diet moderate in salt and sodium

Table salt contains sodium and chloride. Both are essential in the diet. However, most Americans consume more salt and sodium than they need.

Foods containing salt provide most of the sodium in the diet. Much of it is added during processing and manufacturing. For this reason, use salt sparingly, if at all, in cooking and at the table.

Currently, there is no way to predict who will develop high blood pressure. However, it is a good idea to do both of the following:

- serve foods lower in sodium.
- reduce salt during food preparation.

This may help some children avoid high blood pressure when they become adults.



## Menu Planning Tips for Reducing Salt and Sodium

### ***Foods with a lot of added salt include:***

- Cured and processed meats
- Cheeses
- Ready-to-eat snacks
- Prepared frozen entrees and dinners
- Packaged mixes
- Canned soups
- Salad dressings
- Pickles

### ***If you are planning to serve any of these foods:***

- Check the sodium content.
- Select foods that have less sodium.

**ALSO:*****When preparing foods...***

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- Season foods lightly with salt.
- Review recipes for ways to reduce sodium, such as: (1) substituting herbs and spices for some of the salt; and/or (2) reducing the amount of salt added.
- Do not add salt when cooking pasta and rice.
- Do not boil down the vegetable liquid when preparing canned vegetables. (Boiling down the vegetable liquid can increase the amount of salt the vegetables absorb.)

***When deciding what to serve...***

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- Read food labels carefully for sodium content. Choose foods that are lower in sodium.
- Keep in mind that fresh and frozen vegetables that are lightly seasoned with salt are generally lower in sodium than canned ones.
- Limit the number of times you serve salted snacks, such as crackers or pretzels.
- Serve smaller amounts of salty condiments, such as mustard, catsup, relish, and salad dressing—or serve them less often.

## Support programs that encourage children to choose a drug-free and alcohol-free lifestyle

The final Dietary Guidelines recommendation is targeted to adults and states: “If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.”

**Children and teens should not drink alcoholic beverages.**

Use of alcoholic beverages involves risks to health and other serious problems. As someone who cares about children’s health and well-being, support programs that encourage children to choose a drug-free and alcohol-free lifestyle.



# The USDA Food Guide Pyramid

The USDA Food Guide Pyramid is an outline of what to eat each day based on the Dietary Guidelines. The Pyramid makes it easier to understand what is meant by good nutrition. It also helps us plan for healthy changes in our diets.

## How can the Food Guide Pyramid help you?

The Food Guide Pyramid *is not* a rigid prescription. It is a *general guide* that lets you choose a healthful diet that is right for you and the children in your care. Just by looking at the Pyramid, you and your children can get a good picture of the kinds of foods to eat.

The Food Guide Pyramid emphasizes the foods from the major food groups shown in the three lower sections of the Pyramid. The tip is the smallest part of the Pyramid and these foods—fats, oils, and sweets—may be eaten in small amounts.



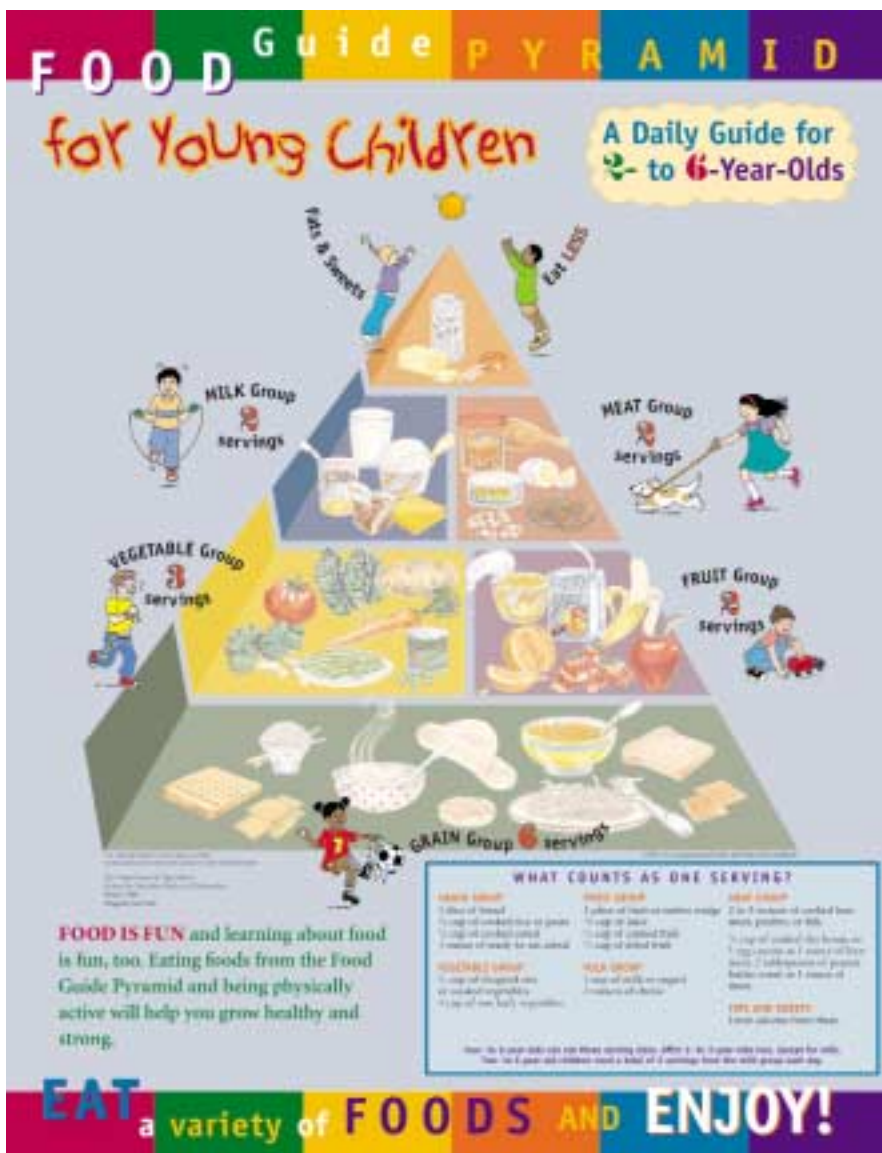


## Has USDA adapted the Food Guide Pyramid for children?

Yes. USDA has adapted the original Pyramid to provide special guidance for young children. The USDA Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children is targeted toward children ages 2 to 6 years old.

Like the traditional Food Guide Pyramid, the Pyramid for Young Children is an outline of what to eat each day based on the Dietary Guidelines. It similarly emphasizes balanced meals, moderation, and variety in food choices, with special emphasis on grain products, fruits, and vegetables. There are some differences, however, and these are explained on the next page.

It is important to keep in mind that the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children does not adjust serving sizes for different ages of children. Refer to CACFP meal patterns in Chapter 2 for information about serving sizes.



## What is the main focus of the Pyramid for Young Children?

The main focus of the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children is on eating a variety of foods. The Pyramid divides foods into five major food groups: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, and meat.

The foods shown in the Pyramid are those that many children know and enjoy. Each of these food groups provides some, but not all, of the nutrients and energy children need. No one food group is more important than another. After all, for proper health and proper growth, children need to eat a variety of different foods every day.

## How is the Pyramid for Young Children different from the original?

The Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children is different from the original in several ways. For example:

- The food group names are shorter and use single numbers for numbers of servings, rather than ranges.
- The Pyramid graphic was designed to be appealing to young children. It uses realistic food items, in single-serving portions.
- It eliminates the abstract “sprinkles” that symbolized fat and added sugar in the original Pyramid. It replaces them with drawings in the tip of the Pyramid.
- It emphasizes the educational message that physical activity is important. Surrounding the Pyramid are drawings of young children engaged in active pursuits.

*See Appendix F, Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children.*

# Understanding Food Labels

Food labels are sources of accurate nutrition information about individual food products. Food labels can help us select foods that are healthful and nutritious.

When you select a food product, most nutrition information will be listed under a section called “Nutrition Facts.” It is important to read the entire label and not simply the claims about nutrition.





## What information must every food label include?

According to Federal guidelines, every food label must include all of the following information:

- the common name of the product.
- the name and address of the manufacturer, packer, or distributor.
- the net contents in terms of weight, measure, or count.
- the ingredients, in order of predominance by weight from greatest to least.
- nutrition information.
- serving size.

## As listed, are the serving sizes for adults or children?

The serving sizes listed are for healthy adults and not for children, so serving sizes on packages would need to be adjusted for children.

## Are terms such as “low fat” clearly defined?

Terms such as *low fat*, *high fiber*, *free*, *low*, *light* and others are clearly defined. (See Appendix G for a chart of nutrient terms and their definitions.)

## What is listed under Nutrition Facts?

The Nutrition Facts panel includes information on:

- |                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| ■ total calories     | ■ dietary fiber |
| ■ calories from fat  | ■ sugars        |
| ■ total fat          | ■ protein       |
| ■ saturated fat      | ■ vitamin A     |
| ■ cholesterol        | ■ vitamin C     |
| ■ sodium             | ■ calcium       |
| ■ total carbohydrate | ■ iron          |

## How is Percent Daily Value information helpful?

The information provided under Percent Daily Value helps you see how a food fits into a 2,000 calorie reference diet. The value tells you if a food contains a little or a lot of a nutrient.

Use the Percent Daily Value to compare foods. Look for a lower value for nutrients most people need to limit, such as fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, or sodium. Look for a higher value for nutrients most people need to increase in their diets, such as carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals.

## To use the Percent Daily Value for children, will you need to make adjustments?

Yes. The Percent Daily Value is based on an adult's reference diet of 2,000 calories per day. The average energy recommendation for children ages 1 through 3 years is 1,300 calories a day. The average for children ages 4 through 6 years is 1,800 calories per day. To use the Percent Daily Value for children, you will need to make adjustments, as appropriate.

## What will the ingredients list help you do?

The ingredients list will help you choose foods with the ingredients you want. The ingredient in the greatest amount is listed first and the ingredient in the least amount is listed last.

# The Food Label at a Glance

The food label carries an up-to-date, easier to use nutrition information guide, which is required on almost all packaged foods. The guide serves as a key to help in planning a healthy diet. (The illustration below is only a sample. Exact specifications are available from the Food and Drug Administration.)

*Nutrition Facts:* This title signals that the label contains the required information.

*Amount per serving:* Serving sizes are (1) more consistent across product lines; (2) are stated in both household and metric measures; and (3) reflect the amounts people actually eat.

*List of nutrients:* This list covers those nutrients most important to the health of today's consumers. Most consumers need to worry about getting too much of certain nutrients (fat, for example) rather than too few vitamins or minerals, as in the past.

*Calories per gram:* The label of larger packages like this one tell the number of calories per gram of fat, carbohydrate, and protein.

*Calories from fat:* Calories from fat are shown on the label to help consumers meet dietary guidelines that recommend people get no more than 30 percent of the calories in their overall diet from fat.

*Percent Daily Value:* This shows how a food fits into the overall daily diet.

*A note about daily values:* Some daily values are maximums, as with fat (65 grams or less). Others are minimums, as with carbohydrate (300 grams or more). On the label of larger packages such as the one pictured here, the daily values for a 2,000 calorie diet and a 2,500 calorie diet are listed.

| <b>Nutrition Facts</b>  |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Serving Size 1/2 cup (114g)   |                             |
| Servings Per Container 4  |                             |
| Amount Per Serving  |                             |
| <b>Calories 90</b>  | <b>Calories from Fat 30</b> |
| % Daily Value*  |                             |
| <b>Total Fat 3g</b>   | <b>5%</b>                   |
| Saturated Fat 0g  | 0%                          |
| <b>Cholesterol 0mg</b>  | <b>0%</b>                   |
| <b>Sodium 300mg</b>   | <b>13%</b>                  |
| <b>Total Carbohydrate 13g</b>   | <b>4%</b>                   |
| Dietary Fiber 3g  | 12%                         |
| Sugars 3g   |                             |
| <b>Protein 3g</b>   |                             |
| Vitamin A 80%   | • Vitamin C 60%             |
| Calcium 4%  | • Iron 10%                  |
| * Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs: |                             |
|   | Calories: 2,000 2,500       |
| Total Fat   | Less than 65g 80g           |
| Sat Fat   | Less than 20g 25g           |
| Cholesterol   | Less than 300mg 300mg       |
| Sodium  | Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg   |
| Total Carbohydrate  | 300g 375g                   |
| Dietary Fiber   | 25g 30g                     |
| Calories per gram:<br>Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4  |                             |