



# HEALTH

## A Guide for Daily Food Choices

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### Quick Facts...

Choose foods daily from the five major food groups.

Each day, select at least the smaller number of servings suggested for each group. Limit total amount of food eaten to maintain healthy weight.

Emphasize food choices that are low in fat and sugars.

Limit the intake of fats, oils, sweets and alcoholic beverages.

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: breads, cereals, rice, pasta and other grain products; fruits; vegetables; meats, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs and nuts; and milk, cheese, yogurt and calcium sources (see Figure 1). A varied diet that contains foods from these groups each day provides the protein, vitamins, minerals, starch and dietary fiber needed.

At the tip of the pyramid, there is a sixth group: fat, oils and sweets. Foods from this group supply mainly calories and few vitamins and minerals. Eat them in moderation.

It also is 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, 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 activity level. Almost everyone should have at least the minimum number of servings daily from each food group listed in Table 1. Many women, older children and most teenagers and men need more. The top of the range is appropriate for an active man or teenage boy. Young children may not need as much food. They can have smaller servings from all groups except milk — they should have the equivalent of 2 cups of milk each day.

Some people, such as vegetarians and others, 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 9.324, *Vegetarian Diets*.

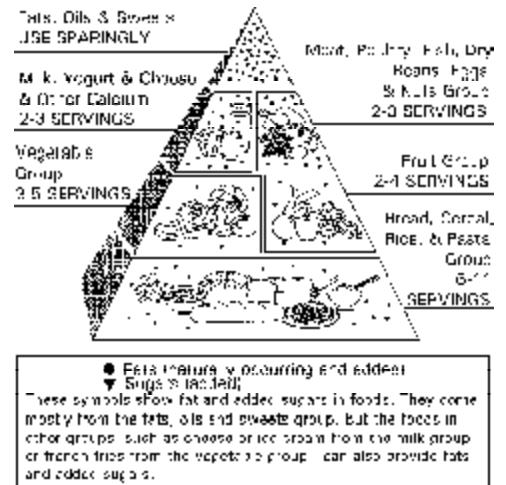


Figure 1: Food Guide Pyramid.

**Table 1: A daily food guide.**

Food Group	Suggested Daily Servings	What Counts as Serving	Nutrients
Breads, cereals, rice, pasta and other grain products * Whole-grain * Enriched	6-11 servings from group. (Include several servings of whole-grain products daily.)	* 1 slice bread * 1/2 hamburger bun, bagel or English muffin * small roll, biscuit, muffin * 1 8-9 in. flour or 1 1/2 corn tortilla * 3 to 4 small or 2 large crackers * 1/2 cup cooked cereal, rice or pasta * 1 oz. ready-to-eat cereal	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.
Fruits * Citrus, melon, berries * Other fruits	2-4 servings from entire group.	* whole fruit such as medium apple, banana * grapefruit half * melon wedge * 3/4 cup juice * 1/2 cup berries * 1/2 cup cooked or canned fruit * 1/4 cup dried fruit	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.
Vegetables * Dark green, leafy * Deep yellow * Dry beans and peas (legumes) * Starchy vegetables * Other vegetables	3-5 servings from entire group. (Include all types regularly; eat dark green leafy vegetables, dry beans and peas several times a week.)	* 1/2 cup cooked or chopped raw vegetables or legumes * 1 cup leafy raw vegetables, such as lettuce or spinach * 3/4 cup vegetable juice	Dark green leafy vegetables are good sources of vitamins A and C, riboflavin, folic acid, calcium, magnesium, potassium and fiber. Deep yellow 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.
Meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs and nuts	2-3 servings from entire group.	* 2-3 oz. cooked lean meat, poultry or fish * 1 cup cooked dry beans * 2 eggs * 4 tablespoons peanut butter	Foods in this group are sources of many nutrients: protein, niacin, vitamins B <sub>6</sub> and B <sub>12</sub> , iron, phosphorus and zinc.
Milk, yogurt, cheese and calcium sources	2-3 servings from entire group. (3 servings for teens, young adults to age 24, and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.)	* 1 cup milk * 8 oz. yogurt * 1 1/2 oz. natural cheese * 2 oz. processed cheese	Foods in this group are good sources of calcium, protein, riboflavin, vitamin B <sub>12</sub> , 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.
Fats, oils, and sweets	Use sparingly. Foods in this group provide calories and little else nutritionally.		

Adapted from: USDA's *Food Guide Pyramid*, 1992. Home and Garden Bulletin No. 249, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Human Nutrition Information Service.

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