

Teaching MyPyramid

MyPyramid is one way for people to understand how to eat healthfully. A rainbow of colored, vertical stripes represents the five food groups plus fats and oils. Here's what the colors stand for:

- orange - grains
- green - vegetables
- red - fruits
- yellow - fats and oils
- blue - milk and dairy products
- purple - meat, beans, fish, and nuts

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) changed the pyramid in spring 2005 because they wanted to do a better job of telling Americans how to be healthy. The agency later released a special version for kids. Notice the girl climbing the staircase up the side of the pyramid? That's a way of showing kids how important it is to exercise and be active every day. In other words, play a lot! The steps are also a way of saying that you can make changes little by little to be healthier – one step at a time.

The Pyramid Speaks

Let's look at some of the other messages this new symbol is trying to send:

Eat a variety of foods. A balanced diet is one that includes all the food groups. In other words, have foods from every color, every day.

Eat less of some foods and more of others. You can see that the bands for meat and protein (purple) and oils (yellow) are skinnier than the others. That's because you need less of those kinds of foods than you do of fruits, vegetables, grains and dairy foods.

You also can see the bands start out wider and get thinner as they approach the top. That's designed to show you that not all foods are created equal, even within a healthy food group like fruit. For instance, apple pie might be in that thin part of the fruit band because it has a lot of added sugar and fat. A whole apple would be down in the wide part because you can eat more of those within a healthy diet.

Make it your own. Through the USDA's MyPyramid website (www.mypyramid.gov), people can get personalized recommendations about the mix of foods they need to eat and how much they should be eating. There is a kids' version of the website (www.mypyramid.gov/kids) available too.

How Much Do I Need to Eat?

Everyone wants to know how much they should eat to stay healthy. It's a tricky question, though. It depends on your age, whether you're a girl or a boy, and how active you are. Kids who are more active burn more calories, so they need more calories. But we can give you some ideas for how much you need of each food group.

Grains

Bread, cereal, rice, pasta, oatmeal, pancakes and tortillas are some foods in the grain group. Foods in the grains group give our bodies and our brains energy we need to move and think. Grain servings are measured in ounce equivalents. Ounce equivalents are just another way of showing a serving size. Here are ounce equivalents for common grain foods. An ounce equivalent equals:

- 1 piece of bread
- ½ cup of cooked cereal, like oatmeal
- ½ cup of rice or pasta
- 1 cup of cold cereal

This is how many grain ounce equivalents kids need each day:

- 4- to 8-year-olds need 4-5 ounce equivalents each day
- 9- to 13-year-old girls need 5 ounce equivalents each day
- 9- to 13-year-old boys need 6 ounce equivalents each day

And one last thing about grains: try to eat a lot of whole grains, such as 100% wheat bread, brown rice and oatmeal.

Vegetables

Of course, you need your vegetables, especially those dark green and orange ones. Vegetables are all different colors and provide us with lots of vitamins, minerals and fiber. Our bodies use these vitamins, minerals and fiber to keep us healthy and give us energy. They also can help protect us from getting sick. It's important to eat vegetables of all different colors so we can get as much of the good stuff as possible. But how much is enough? Vegetable servings are measured in cups. This is how many vegetables kids need each day:

- 4- to 8-year-olds need 1½ cups of veggies each day
- 9- to 13-year-old girls need 2 cups of veggies each day
- 9- to 13-year-old boys need 2½ cups of veggies each day

Fruits

Sweet, juicy fruit is definitely part of a healthy diet. Just like vegetables, fruits are all different colors and provide us with lots of vitamins, minerals and fiber. Our bodies use these vitamins, minerals and fiber to keep us healthy and give us energy. They also can help protect us from getting sick. It's important to eat fruits of all different colors so we can get as much of the good stuff as possible. But how much is enough? Fruit servings are measured in cups. This is how many fruits kids need each day:

- 4- to 8-year-olds need 1-1½ cups of fruit each day
- 9- to 13-year-old girls need 1½ cups of fruit each day
- 9- to 13-year-old boys need 1½ cups of fruit each day

Milk and Other Calcium-Rich Foods

Milk, smoothies, yogurt, cheese, milkshakes, ice cream and cottage cheese are some of the foods in this group. Dairy products give us calcium and protein and help make our teeth and bones strong. Dairy products are measured in cups. This is how much dairy kids need each day:

- 4- to 8-year-olds need 1-2 cups of milk (or another calcium-rich food) each day
- 9- to 13-year-old girls need 3 cups of milk (or another calcium-rich food) each day
- 9- to 13-year-old boys need 3 cups of milk (or another calcium-rich food) each day

If you want something other than milk, you can substitute yogurt, cheese, or calcium-fortified orange juice - just to name a few.

Meats, Beans, Fish, and Nuts

These foods contain protein, iron and lots of other important nutrients. Meats like beef and pork are in this group. Fish, chicken, eggs, beans, nuts and seeds are also in this group. Dried peas and beans are included in the meat group because they are a source of protein. Like grains, these foods are measured in ounce equivalents. An ounce equivalent of this group would be:

- 1 ounce of meat, poultry, or fish
- ¼ cup cooked dry beans
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon of peanut butter
- a small handful of nuts or seeds

This is how many meat ounce equivalents kids need each day:

- 4- to 8-year-olds need 3-4 ounce equivalents each day
- 9- to 13-year-old girls need 5 ounce equivalents each day
- 9- to 13-year-old boys need 5 ounce equivalents each day

Oils

Oils are not a food group, but you need some for good health. It is best to get your oils from fish, nuts and liquid oils such as corn oil, soybean oil and canola oil.

Find Your Balance between Food and Fun

Move more. The person climbing the stairs reminds you to do something active every day. You can run, walk the dog, play, swim, ride your bike, dance, rollerblade or even climb the stairs. It all counts! Kids should aim for at least 60 minutes every day.