

Lesson 4 *The Biggest Loser*

My Pyramid -- A Guide for Food Choices

Although many of you were motivated to join *The Biggest Loser* to shed extra pounds, this challenge is about overall health and fitness. Therefore, we don't have a "diet" for you to follow, or even a recommendation for consuming a certain number of calories.

A person's diet is the food and drink regularly consumed each day, so your goal is to select a variety of foods that will provide the nutrients needed for good health. The amount of food you eat each day will depend on your own needs. There are no set calories. An individual's caloric needs are determined by the following

- age
- gender
- family genetics and body metabolism
- body size and weight
- activity and exercise level.

Where do you start in determining what you should eat and how many calories to consume? **My Pyramid** is a great visual guide to use for making your own food choices. This food pyramid was unveiled in April 2005. It probably looks quite different from visuals you may remember when you were in school and learned about the different food groups. One major difference is activity is an important part - balancing the food eaten with exercise to maintain a healthy weight.



MyPyramid has each food group represented by a colored band that goes from bottom to top, and represents that foods from all groups are needed. The body needs more than 40 nutrients and no one food supplies all. The key to good eating is to *select a variety of healthy foods from each food group every day. Remember, there are no good or bad foods, there are wiser choices.*

What do the parts of MyPyramid mean?

Starting on the left, the widest band is grains, next is vegetables, then fruits, followed by a tiny band for fats and oils, a wider band for dairy foods, and on the right side is protein rich foods like meat, dried beans, and nuts.

The food group widths were selected to show the importance of eating certain foods for health. The three food groups with the widest sections are those where more servings are recommended for good health. The recommendations are:

- 6 oz of grains with at least half (3 oz.) being whole grain products;
- at least 3 to 5 servings of fruits and vegetables, including dark green, leafy and orange; and
- 3 cups or equivalent of calcium-rich foods.

Each food group starts out wide at the bottom and get thinner towards the top. This shows that not all foods in a category are nutritionally equal. For example, in the fruit (red) group, the bottom is wider indicating the importance of eating more raw fruits like a fresh apple. The foods represented at the bottom of the pyramid are **nutrient dense**. This means they provide lots of nutritional value without a lot of calories. An apple at 80 calories has fiber, vitamins A, C, B, minerals of potassium and calcium, and carbohydrates for energy.

As each food group band goes up, it gets narrower. The middle part of each band represents foods which have more calories and less important nutrients. An example of fruits in the middle of the band might be applesauce or fruit canned in syrup. The thin top of each food group represents a choice you would eat occasionally. In this example of fruit, it might be a piece of apple pie that has 250 calories, lots of sugar and fat and very little vitamin B or C due to the cooking.

Look at each of the other food groups in **MyPyramid**. For each of the food groups, think of examples of foods which you eat that would be found closer to the base and are nutrient dense. Then, think of examples of foods in your meals or snacks that would be at the top of the pyramid for that food group. These foods are okay to choose "sometimes" but are not what we recommend you eat "everyday".

In the middle of the **MyPyramid** is a very tiny yellow band. This band represents added fats and oils. Since fats and oils can add a lot of calories with very little nutritional value, they are called discretionary calories. Discretionary calories are the extras and add-ons while essential calories are those needed to meet your daily nutrient needs.

Be very wise when selecting foods from the fats and oils group. While oils provide essential fatty acids in the diet, most people get enough of these through the foods they normally eat. Most individuals, unless very active, only have 100 to 300 calories each day that are discretionary.

Use **MyPyramid** to plan your daily food choices. If you are extremely active and burn up extra calories, you can eat more of the foods containing fat and sugar that are represented on the upper part of each food group. If you are trying to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight, choose foods with fewer calories and more nutrients.

Colorado State University Extension Fact Sheet 9.306, *A Guide for Daily Food Choices*, is a resource that gives you suggested daily amounts for each of the food groups and includes nutrients important for health. Copies can be accessed at www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs or at your local Extension office.

To calculate your own personalized food plan, go to www.MyPyramid.gov and select **MyPyramid Plan**. The website is interactive and contains information to help you with food choices and activity levels. You can also link to **MyPyramid Tracker** where you can evaluate your food intake for the recommended nutrients needed for good health.

References:

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, Colorado State University Extension Fact Sheet 9.353, www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs
A Guide for Daily Food Choices, Colorado State University Extension Fact Sheet 9.306, www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs
US Department of Agriculture, My Pyramid 2005, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, www.mypyramid.gov
A Healthier Weigh, CSU Extension, Logan and Morgan counties and Golden Plains Area