

The Food Pyramid

Tutor's Handbook



The Food Pyramid

Different Food Pyramids

We are all familiar with the food pyramid for our western diet. It is a graphical representation – shaped like a pyramid – of the different food groups. Those at the bottom of the pyramid – like fruit and vegetables – are the foods that we should have the most of each day, and those at the top of the pyramid – like sweets and junk food – should be eaten sparingly.

We have each grown up with this model of the food pyramid; however, were you aware that there are different food pyramids out there for a range of different purposes?

There are food pyramids for people with diabetes, which changes the normal food pyramid guidelines to incorporate more food that lowers blood sugars. There are also food pyramids for children and for adults over the age of 70, this is because our nutritional needs change as we age. Furthermore, there are different food pyramids for specific diets that are followed around the world, including:

- Asian Diet Pyramid
- Latin American Diet Pyramid
- Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

This handbook will explore these different food pyramids so that you can discuss these different nutrition resources with members of your local health network.

Food Pyramids as we Age

The US Department of Agriculture have published a food pyramid specifically for children, to make it easier for children to understand the pyramid, and to also provide some guidance to parents and care-givers about some of the essential fats and oils that children need, as well as giving some recommendations for the amount of exercise children should be getting each day to be healthy and to maintain a healthy weight.

The food pyramid for children contains six stripes, which represent the five food groups, as well as the fats and oils that child should consume each day. Each colour represents a different food group.

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- Orange: Grains
 - Green: Vegetables
 - Red: Fruits
 - Blue: Dairy and Calcium-Rich Foods
 - Purple: Proteins
 - Yellow: Fats and Oils

The width of the coloured stripe gives children a visual understanding that more servings need to be eaten from one group, such as grains, while others specify a smaller serving size need, such as the fats and oils group. The stairs on the side of the pyramid represent the importance of exercise for children, with a minimum recommendation of 30 minutes of moderate exercise per day for young

children, and 60 minutes of exercise or physical activity recommended for older children, five times per week. To learn more about the recommendations for children's nutrition, visit:

<https://www.parents.com/recipes/nutrition/kids/updated-the-kids-food-pyramid/>

While the majority of the adult population can follow the mainstream food pyramid, as we age, our nutritional needs change slightly. To respond to this need, researchers have developed a specific food pyramid which shows the different dietary and nutrition requirements of people over the age of 70. This food pyramid promotes smaller portions of fruit, vegetables, meats, breads, pastas and grains, compared to the normal food pyramid, an equal quantity of dairy and eggs, and the inclusion of the need to consume 8 glasses of water each day as we get older. For more information on the recommendations published in the Journal of Nutrition, please visit:

<https://academic.oup.com/jn/article/129/3/751/4722151>. A graphical comparison of the mainstream and adapted food pyramids is also available at this link: <https://academic.oup.com/view-large/figure/112198950/4w0390289001.jpg>

Asian Diet Pyramid

This diet Pyramid represents a healthy diet, with those who follow the Asian diet experiencing low rates of chronic diseases

that we see in Western countries. The reason for this is that the Asian diet contains only a moderate amount of animal products, it is mostly plant based with rice providing anywhere between 25 and 80% of calories consumed each day on this diet. This diet also includes a wide variety of different foods which have their own health benefits. The following guidelines are provided for those who want to follow this diet plan and reap the health benefits:

- Daily servings of: Rice, Noodles, Breads, Millet, Corn and other Whole Grains, Vegetables, Fruits, Legumes, Beans, Seeds and Nuts,
- Optional daily servings of: Fish and Shellfish or Dairy
- Weekly servings of: Eggs, Poultry, and Sweets
- Monthly servings of: Pork or Red meat
- Drinks: Drink 6 glasses of water or tea every day to assure good health. If you're an adult, it's OK to drink alcohol (sake, wine or beer), as long as your alcohol intake is moderate and with meals.
- Exercise: Do some form of physical exercise every day, like Qigong or Tai Chi!

Latin American Diet Pyramid

The Latin American Diet Pyramid represents the healthy diet that is typical to the region, where a lot of potatoes, maize and beans are grown. The diet is inexpensive to follow, and many of the

foods and meals can be quite easy to prepare. As such, it is a good diet to adopt if you are looking to try something new.

To get you started, the following list provides some guidelines on how you can follow the Latin American Diet Pyramid:

- Several servings a day of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, tubers, pasta, beans and nuts
 - Daily servings of poultry, fish & shellfish, plant oils, dairy
 - Once a week you can have some red meat, eggs and sweets
 - Drink 6 glasses of water every day to assure good health.
 - If you're an adult, it's ok to drink alcohol, as long as your alcohol intake is moderate and with meals.
 - Do some form of exercise every day! Here they recommend trying salsa dancing, play some soccer, clean up your house or go for a walk.
- Focus primarily on eating fresh vegetables, fruits and whole grains with daily servings of dried beans, nuts or seeds. Consume fresh foods that are in season where possible.
 - Eat fish regularly and only small amounts of red meat and poultry.
 - Use garlic, onion and herbs to spice your food and reduce the salt.
 - Use olive oil as your main source of fat, instead of butter or margarine.
 - Instead of having high-fat, high-sugar desserts and bakery products, when you want something sweet, instead choose fruits.
 - Adapt to the Mediterranean values of socialising with friends and family when eating – take your time and enjoy your food.
 - Maintain regular exercise but try daily walks and exercises that are not too strenuous on your heart – a daily walk can go a long way!

Mediterranean Diet Pyramid

If you want to live a long and healthy life, free from chronic disease and with a healthy heart, then you should follow the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid. Food scientists and doctors have been studying this diet for many years and have observed these health benefits as being directly linked to the fresh foods that are consumed as part of this diet. In following this diet, you should remind those in your group of the following key points:

How to use this Resource with your Local Health Group?

This handbook presents some introductory information on different food pyramids that represent different diets to the one we typically follow in Western Society. All of these diet pyramids present healthy alternatives to our often-unhealthy food choices. However, some in your group may never have heard of them! The aim of

this resource is to raise awareness among people in your group of the different diet plans that are available to them; and also, to highlight some of the benefits of each diet pyramid for their overall health and feeling of well-being.

To accompany this handbook, you will also find a short PowerPoint presentation that can be used with your local health network to introduce some of these different food pyramids. This presentation gives some of the basic information that is included in this handbook. To use this resource with your local group, we recommend that you first play the short video lecture, talk through the PowerPoint slides given and then lead a group discussion on the topic of diets. Some hints for questions are included below.

Group Activity

Once you have shared the digital resource and the PowerPoint presentation with your group members, you can start a group discussion about different food pyramids. For this, ask people to discuss the different food pyramids presented, by asking:

- Where you aware of these different food pyramids?
- Have you ever considered following a different diet?
- Which is most manageable for you?
- Have you ever considered changing your family's food based on their age and different nutritional requirements? If so, how?

Next lead a group discussion on how people in the group use the food pyramid for meal planning. Reflecting on the slides presented on the Asian Diet, the Latin American Diet and the Mediterranean Diet, ask people in your local health network to work in twos or smaller groups and to plan a full day's meals based on one of these diets. Once all daily meals are planned, each pair can share their meal plan with the rest of the network, and group members can give feedback on each of their efforts.



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