

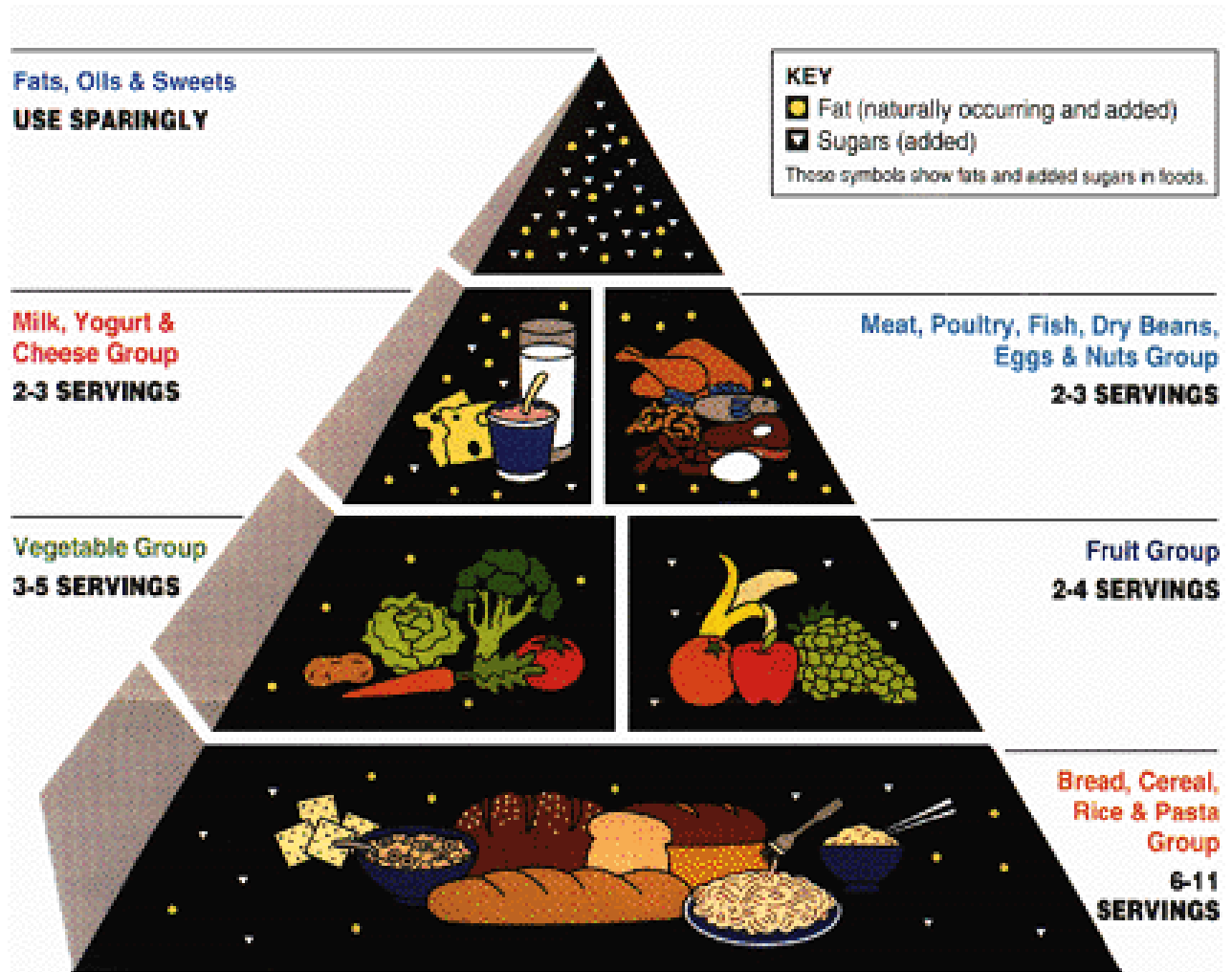


FOOD PYRAMIDS

The current **USDA Food Guide Pyramid** contains these elements:

- **Bread, Cereal, Rice, and Pasta Group (6 to 11 servings):** Carbohydrates are a fundamental part of most diets. Part of the rationale for placing them in the base of the pyramid was that if people filled up on carbohydrates they would eat less fat. When the USDA pyramid was built in 1992, the main message was "fat is evil." But not all fats are bad and not all carbohydrates are good.
- **Vegetable (3 to 5 servings) and Fruit (2 to 4 servings) Group:** A diet rich in fruits and vegetables is one of the best ways to keep healthy. If there's anything close to being "proved" in nutrition research, it's that eating lots of fruits and vegetables reduces the risk of heart disease, some types of cancer, and other chronic diseases. The U.S. government's "5 a day" campaign makes five servings of fruits and vegetables look like a goal when it should actually be a lower limit.
- **Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs, and Nuts Group (2 to 3 servings):** This is essentially the protein group. Everyone needs protein to keep tissues healthy and keep the body running smoothly. Some sources of protein are better than others, yet the USDA Food Guide Pyramid equates heart-healthy fish with bacon and bologna.
- **Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group (2 to 3 servings):** Healthy bones need calcium, which dairy products can supply. (They also need exercise and vitamin D.) But most people don't need the amount of calcium supplied by three servings of milk (1,000 milligrams) a day, and there's some question that dairy products are the best way to prevent osteoporosis, the bone-thinning condition that affects many older women and men.
- **Fats, Oils, and Sweets (Use Sparingly):** When the Food Guide Pyramid was built, policy makers wanted to send a simple message for preventing heart disease: Eat less fat and you will have a better cholesterol level and a healthier heart. The fat phobia spawned by this message probably had little impact on heart disease. But it may have contributed to the current epidemics of obesity and diabetes as people replaced fats with fast-burning carbohydrates. The fat-is-bad message also keeps people from eating healthy fats - monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.

USDA Food Guide Pyramid



USDA and the US Department of Health and Human Services

The **Healthy Eating Pyramid** includes:

- **Whole Grain Foods (at most meals).** The body needs carbohydrates mainly for energy. The best sources of carbohydrates are whole grains such as oatmeal, whole-wheat bread, and brown rice. They deliver the outer (bran) and inner (germ) layers along with energy-rich starch. The body can't digest whole grains as quickly as it can highly processed carbohydrates such as white flour. This keeps blood sugar and insulin levels from rising, then falling, too quickly. Better control of blood sugar and insulin can keep hunger at bay and may prevent the development of type 2 diabetes.
- **Plant Oils.** Surprised that the Healthy Eating Pyramid puts some fats near the base, indicating they are okay to eat? Although this recommendation seems to go against conventional wisdom, it's exactly in line with the evidence and with common eating habits. The average American gets one third or more of his or her daily calories from fats, so placing them near the foundation of the pyramid makes sense. Note, though, that it specifically mentions plant oils, not all types of fat. Good sources of healthy unsaturated fats include olive, canola, soy, corn, sunflower, peanut, and other vegetable oils, as well as fatty fish such as salmon. These healthy fats not only improve cholesterol levels (when eaten in place of highly processed carbohydrates) but can also protect the heart from sudden and potentially deadly rhythm problems.
- **Vegetables (in abundance) and Fruits (2 to 3 times).** A diet rich in fruits and vegetables can decrease the chances of having a heart attack or stroke; protect against a variety of cancers; lower blood pressure; help you avoid the painful intestinal ailment called diverticulitis; guard against cataract and macular degeneration, the major cause of vision loss among people over age 65; and add variety to your diet and wake up your palate.
- **Fish, Poultry, and Eggs (0 to 2 times).** These are important sources of protein. A wealth of research suggests that eating fish can reduce the risk of heart disease. Chicken and turkey are also good sources of protein and can be low in saturated fat. Eggs, which have long been demonized because they contain fairly high levels of cholesterol, aren't as bad as they're cracked up to be. In fact, an egg is a much better breakfast than a doughnut cooked in an oil rich in trans fats or a bagel made from refined flour.
- **Nuts and Legumes (1 to 3 times).** Nuts and legumes are excellent sources of protein, fibre, vitamins, and minerals. Legumes include black beans, navy beans, garbanzos, and other beans that are usually sold dried. Many kinds of nuts contain healthy fats, and packages of some varieties (almonds, walnuts, pecans, peanuts, hazelnuts, and pistachios) can now even carry a label saying they're good for your heart.
- **Dairy or Calcium Supplement (1 to 2 times).** Building bone and keeping it strong takes calcium, vitamin D, exercise, and a whole lot more. Dairy products have traditionally been Americans' main source of calcium. But there are other healthy ways to get calcium than from milk and cheese, which can contain a lot of saturated fat. Three glasses of whole milk, for example, contains as much saturated fat as 13 strips of cooked bacon. If you enjoy dairy foods, try to stick with no-fat or low-fat products. If you don't like dairy products, calcium supplements offer an easy and inexpensive way to get your daily calcium.
- **Red Meat and Butter (Use sparingly):** These sit at the top of the Healthy Eating Pyramid because they contain lots of saturated fat. If you eat red meat every day, switching to fish or chicken several times a week can improve cholesterol levels; so can switching from butter to olive oil.

- **White Rice, White Bread, Potatoes, Pasta, and Sweets (Use sparingly):** Why are these staples at the top, rather than the bottom, of the Healthy Eating Pyramid? They can cause fast and furious increases in blood sugar that can lead to weight gain, diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic disorders. Whole-grain carbohydrates cause slower, steadier increases in blood sugar that don't overwhelm the body's ability to handle this much needed but potentially dangerous nutrient.
- **Multiple Vitamins:** A daily multivitamin, multi-mineral supplement offers a kind of nutritional backup. While it can't in any way replace healthy eating, or make up for unhealthy eating, it can fill in the nutrient holes that may sometimes affect even the most careful eaters. You don't need an expensive name-brand or designer vitamin. A standard, store-brand, RDA-level one is fine. Look for one that meets the requirements of the USP (U.S. Pharmacopoeia), an organization that sets standards for drugs and supplements.
- **Alcohol (in moderation):** Scores of studies suggest that having an alcoholic drink a day lowers the risk of heart disease. Moderation is clearly important, since alcohol has risks as well as benefits. For men, a good balance point is 1 to 2 drinks a day. For women, it's at the most one drink a day.

Healthy Eating Pyramid

