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## what is USDA food pyramid? Some Faq's

### what is USDA food pyramid

The USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) food pyramid is a nutrition guide created and published in 1992 by the USDA. The USDA pyramid guide which became famous throughout the world, gave recommendations as to how much of each of the four main food categories an individual should consumed each day.

### what is USDA food pyramid's main criticisms?

Up until recent years, the USDA food pyramid has been the guide on which many people have modelled their healthy eating habits. However many critics claimed that it did not point the way to healthy eating, since it's guidance was based on less than concrete scientific evidence. The pyramid has also ran into criticisms for being too rigid, in that it suggested food servings but offered no suggestion on serving size.

### what is USDA food pyramid's guidance on fats?

A further criticism is that the USDA Food guide makes no distinction between the healthy fats such as monounsaturated oils and unhealthy saturated fats, despite its recommendation to limit fat intake for weight maintenance. The relevance of this is that the Mediterranean diet contains very little of the two kinds of fats known to raise blood cholesterol levels i.e. saturated fat and trans fat.

### what is USDA food pyramid's guidance on grains and protein foods?

While the USDA pyramid emphasise the importance of eating plentiful fruit and vegetables, whole grains, the USDA Food Guide Pyramid does not distinguish between the high protein food group of red meat, fish or nuts but lump them together in the same category.

### what is USDA food pyramid's guidance on exercise?

The USDA food pyramid offered no suggestion for, or guidance on physical exercise.

### what is USDA food pyramid's most recent change?

The USDA food guide pyramid was recently replaced with the **MyPyramid** version, which has an "interactive food guidance system.

### what is USDA food pyramid's reasons for releasing MyPyramid?

The purpose of MyPyramid is to educate consumers about a lifestyle consistent with the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans, an 80-page document released in January 2005. The guidelines, were produced jointly by the USDA and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), to represent the federal nutrition policy.

### what is USDA food pyramid (MyPyramid) being criticised for?

Whilst it is felt that MyPyramid is a move forward from the old flawed USDA food pyramid, it is generally believed that it does not go far enough in providing sufficient information to help you make more informed choices about the foods you eat and your longer term health. It is also believed that some of its recommendations for food intake are not essential to promoting health and may in fact be un-healthy in the quantities included in MyPyramid.

### what is USDA food pyramid (MyPyramid) plans to update its information?

The USDA released in early January, 2005, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The Guidelines set the standards for federal nutrition programs as well as determining the foods Americans buy. This nutrition and dietary guidelines should in effect be reflected in the MyPyramid food guide. While it is felt that some of its new recommendations take important steps in the right direction, it is still felt that some of the guidance is still rooted in the past and do not go far enough in the direction of healthy eating.

### what is USDA food pyramid new dietary and nutrition guidelines on Grains?

The guidelines suggest it is quite alright to eat 50% of grains in the form of refined starch. As you know, refined starch foods are one of the culprits leading to increased risks of heart disease and diabetes.

### what is USDA food pyramid new dietary and nutrition guidelines on protein?

There is still no distinction made between red meat, poultry fish, beans (legumes), which are still lumped together. The guidance issued is for you to assess fat content of meat and fish, and to base your choices on low fat, lean or non-fat products. There is no acknowledgement of the different kinds of fat content - i.e. saturated and monounsaturated fats and there is no recognition of the growing evidence that fish, poultry, beans and nuts - in place of red meat is better for your health.

### what is USDA food pyramid new dietary and nutrition guidelines on dairy products?

A further fundamental flaw is it's recommendation to consume either three glasses of milk each day or three servings of dairy foods, to prevent osteoporosis; this represent a shift away from current trends in healthy eating. Since consuming dairy products in excess, may increase the risk of health related conditions such as prostate and ovarian cancer.

### what is the alternative to USDA food pyramid (MyPyramid's) new dietary and nutrition guidelines?

To respond the the obvious gap in the USDA pyramid, MyPyramid and the Dietary Guidelines, Harvard School of Public Health produced an alternative - the Healthy Eating Pyramid. This new Healthy Eating Pyramid better reflect the health benefits and research findings of the Mediterranean diet, as well as addressing the flaws and gap in the USDA, MyPyramids and the Dietary Guidelines.

In addition to offering more sound information to help you make choices on what to eat, it is also much more acknowledging of the tremendous amount of research carried out on the Mediterranean diet over the past decade and how it has defined the concept of **healthy eating**.

### how does USDA food pyramid contrast with the healthy living Mediterranean diet

The healthy eating pyramid developed by Harvard is a nutrition guide that offers guidance on how much of each food category you should consume each day. It aims to include the most current research findings on dietary health, - something that is missing from the USDA food pyramid, as well as a better differentiation between all the food groups. It shares a similar value base to that of the Mediterranean diet, - in that, it is more reflective of the healthy eating habits and lifestyle of people from that region.

**"Blessed are the flexible for they shall not bend out of shape"**. (Dr Michael McGriffy)

### Self-Help resources

The healthy eating pyramid's recommendations appears more in keeping with the healthy patterns of the Mediterranean diet and lifestyle.

To help you further, you can access here, some frequently asked questions

Learn more about the health benefits and research findings of the Mediterranean diet

You can get a quick assessment of your food intake and physical activity level by visiting the MyPyramid site: <http://www.mypyramid.gov/>

#### Further Resources

You can find more information on diet at the following sites:

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005. For the 70 page scientific document <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/>

For the consumer brochure - Finding Your Way to a Healthier You <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/html/brochure.htm>

The information on this site is purely of educational value and is not intended to replace your seeking medical advice. You must consult your doctor over all your health concerns.

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