

## FOOD PYRAMID

Many of us have our plates full, so to speak, with a merry-go-round of tasks and activities that keep us on the run. Sometimes it's easy to forget that a proper diet is necessary to keep us going. Each family member may have a different schedule and gathering everyone around the dinner table may seem next to impossible. Does this sound like your family? Do you fret over your teen grabbing a frozen snack and calling it dinner?

The new food pyramid provides a handy way to make sure your family gets the nutrition they need, no matter the pace of life. Let's take a look at how easy it can be to ensure good nutrition.

The food pyramid is divided into five major categories: grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy products and meats. We'll offer suggestions on working these essentials into the daily fare with nary a complaint.

Grains encompass many of the staples we all have on hand in our cupboards. Food pyramid guidelines recommend the inclusion of whole grains, such as whole wheat, rolled oats and brown or wild rice. Try whole wheat pita bread for the lunch box sandwich. A baggie loaded with whole-wheat crackers in a mix of nuts and raisins makes a delicious and nutritious snack. Use rolled oats for a batch of oatmeal cookies.

Fruits provide essential vitamins as well as dietary fiber. Fresh fruits that are in season are at the peak of flavor and are less expensive than out of season choices. Pop a fresh peach in the lunch bag. Make your own granola mix with a liberal sprinkling of dried fruits. Fruit and yogurt make a tasty dessert or breakfast smoothie. Homemade fruit pie is always welcome.

Vegetables hold a prominent spot on the food pyramid and are easy to make into subtle dietary stars. As possible, choose fresh vegetables in season. Put them in pilafs, dinner salads, omelettes or casseroles. A plate of whole grain crackers, celery, carrots and cheese cubes with dip on the side makes a triple hitter for the food pyramid priorities.

Dairy products are excellent sources of calcium. Cheese, yogurt, calcium-fortified juices and soy beverages offer good alternatives for the lactose intolerant. A sprinkling of shredded cheese adds a dose of calcium to a dinner salad or layered into a sandwich. Encourage the kids to reach for a glass of milk or soy beverage instead of a soda.

Meats are best for your health when they are lean. Chicken breasts, fish and

pork chops rate high on the food pyramid, as good sources of protein, while being low on fat. Vegans can keep their protein intake up with tofu, veggie-burgers, beans and nuts standing in for meats.

Use these tips to get nutrition on your family's meal agenda. A quick glance at the food pyramid components can inspire healthy menus and snack items to keep you on track with good eating habits. Bon Appetit!