



Fact Sheet

Student Health Services, Texas A&M University

Balancing Act: How to Achieve a Balanced Diet

What's the best nutrition advice?

The best nutrition advice is to follow the recommended 2008 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These ten guidelines can help college students choose healthy foods. By following the Dietary Guidelines, you can enjoy better health and reduce your chances of getting certain diseases - such as heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, certain cancers and adult-onset, or type II diabetes. These Guidelines are the most up-to-date advice from nutrition experts.

2008 Dietary Guidelines:

1. Balance calories from foods and beverages with calories expended. Follow food guide for appropriate calorie requirements based on age and physical activity level.
2. Consume a variety of nutrient-dense foods and beverages. Follow a balanced eating pattern such as the USDA Food Guide or DASH Eating Plan.
3. Consume enough fruits and vegetables while staying within energy needs. Two cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables per day for a reference 2,000 calorie intake. Make adjustments for various calorie levels.
4. Include 3 ounces or more of whole grains with at least ½ of grains from whole grains.
5. Consume 3 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent
6. Keep total fat between 20 to 35 percent of calories, with most fats coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats.
7. Consume less than 2,300 mg (approximately 1 tsp of salt) of sodium per day and include potassium-rich foods such as fruits and vegetables.
8. Choose and prepare foods with little added sugars or caloric sweeteners.
9. Be sensible, drink in moderation, defined as one drink per day for women and two per day for men.

For more information on the Dietary Guidelines, download the following brochure: [Dietary Guidelines Brochure](#)

What is the Food Guide Pyramid?

The Food Guide Pyramid is an outline of what to eat each day based on the Dietary Guidelines. It provides a general guide that lets you choose a healthy diet that's right for you. The Pyramid calls for eating a variety of foods to get the nutrients you need and at the same time, the right amount of calories to maintain a healthy weight. For your individualized pyramid, and food tracking program go to mypyramid.gov.

What counts as 1 serving?

Serving sizes vary from food to food. If you eat a larger portion, count it as more than 1 serving. For example, a dinner portion of spaghetti can be 2 or 3 servings of pasta.

Be sure to eat at least the minimum number of servings from each of the major food groups listed. You need foods from each food group to get the vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates and protein they provide. Try to choose the lower fat choices from the food groups. No specific serving size is given for the fats, oils and sweets group. These should be USED SPARINGLY. The following are some examples of serving sizes you can use as a guide.

Food Groups—Serving Sizes

Breads/Starch/Grain/Pasta

1 slice of bread
1/2 bagel
1/2 cup of cooked rice or pasta
1/2 cup of cooked cereal
about 1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal

Fruit/Vegetable

1 piece of medium sized fruit
1/2 to 3/4 cup of juice
1 cup of leafy raw vegetables
1/2 cup of chopped raw/cooked vegetables

Milk/Yogurt/Cheese

1 cup of milk or yogurt
1/2 ounce natural cheese
2 ounces processed cheese
1/2 cup cottage cheese

Meat/Poultry/Fish/Dry Beans/Eggs and Nuts

3 ounces of cooked lean meat, poultry or fish
1/2 cup of cooked beans, 1 egg & 2 tablespoons of peanut butter count as 1 ounce of lean meat

Fats, Oils and Sweets

Limit calories from these, especially if you need to lose weight. The smallest part of the Pyramid shows fats, oils and sweets. Foods in this group provide calories, but few vitamins or minerals. Some examples are salad dressings, butter, margarine, sugars, soft drinks, alcoholic beverages and sweet desserts. Most people should go easy on this group.

Fats and sugars can also be found in foods in the other Food Groups. Cheese or ice cream from the milk group and French fries from the vegetable group are good examples. Consider fat and added sugars in all of your different food choices when choosing foods for a healthful diet.

3 Steps to Obtaining a Balanced Diet

Step 1- Eat foods from all the different Food Groups every day

Foods from the Milk, Meat, Fruit/Vegetable and Bread/Starch/Grain/Pasta Groups can supply over 40 nutrients your body needs to stay healthy. Consuming a variety of foods from each Food Group provides sources of many different nutrients. That's why it's important to eat foods from all of these Food Groups.

Step 2- Include a wide variety of foods

Foods within a Food Group are usually good sources of the same nutrients. But some foods are better sources of a particular nutrient than others. By eating different foods within each Food Group, you have a good chance of receiving all the nutrients you need.

Step 3- Practice moderation

By practicing moderation you can obtain the nutrients you need without getting too many calories or too much fat or sodium. If you eat your meals slowly you will be able to tell when your body gets full and won't overeat.

Eating Foods in Moderation

Cut down on fat and calories:

- Limit high-fat foods - fried foods, cream sauces, high-fat dressings, etc.
- Bake, roast, steam, boil, or broil your foods.
- Choose skim, 1% or 2% milk; low-fat or nonfat yogurt and cheeses.
- Select leaner cuts of meat, chicken, fish, "loin" beef, and trim off excess fat.
- Season with herbs and spices, rather than salt, soy sauce or steak sauce.
- Choose fresh, rather than canned, vegetables, fish and meats. If you do get canned vegetables, rinse the vegetables with water to rid them of excess salts.
- Look for labels that say low or reduced-sodium.

Increase fiber:

- Eat fresh fruits and vegetables with their skins.
- Select whole grain breads, bran cereals, brown rice, nuts and seeds.
- Include dried beans and peas.

Other Tips for using the Food Guide Pyramid:

- If you want to *lose weight*, or if you are a female and just want to maintain your current weight, you need to keep your intake around the lower values on the pyramid. This is for women who do not exercise more than 2-3 times for 30 minutes per week.
- If you want to *gain weight*, or are an average male and want to maintain your current weight, you should try to keep your intake more towards the higher values on the pyramid.
- ALWAYS watch excess fats and sugars no matter what your goal.
- Remember - that the Pyramid is there to remind you that a diet high in a variety of foods will enable you to get the most from what you eat. A balanced diet can mean a more balanced you.

For more information on The Food Guide Pyramid, visit the following website: mypyramid.com