

NUTRITION INFORMATION

Understanding the new food labels

The Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990 created a new food labeling system which is more user friendly and which offers more complete, useful and accurate information than ever before. The rectangular Nutrition Facts panel appears on almost all packaged foods. The Nutrition Facts required on the label are serving size, servings per container, calories, calories from fat, percent of Daily Value and the actual amount for total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrate, dietary fiber, sugars, and proteins. Percent daily value is also given for vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium and iron. Information that may help reduce your chances for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, obesity, diabetes and some forms of cancer is given to help make wise food choices and plan healthful meals.

The Food Guide Pyramid

The Food Guide Pyramid, A Guide to Daily Food Choices is an outline of what to eat each day. It was published in 1992 by the United States Department of Agriculture. The information in the Pyramid is based on the Dietary Guidelines and will help you choose what and how much to eat from each food group to get the nutrients you need and not too many calories or too much fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sugar, sodium or alcohol. The Pyramid suggests 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. The base of the Pyramid is the Bread, Cereal, Rice and Pasta Group with a recommended 6-11 servings. The next level of the Pyramid has 3-5 servings from the Vegetable Group and 2 to 4 servings of Fruit. We need two to three servings of Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese. Two to three servings of Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs, and Nuts are recommended. The tip of the food pyramid urges consumers to use Fats, Oils, and Sweets sparingly. *Printed materials on the Food Guide Pyramid are available in the local USU Extension Office.

Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans The fourth edition of the Dietary Guidelines was released in December 1995 by the United States Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services. The Guidelines were designed to help Americans choose diets that will meet nutrient requirements, promote health, support active lives, and reduce chronic disease risks. The Guidelines include:

- Eat a variety of foods
- Balance the food you eat with physical activity--maintain or improve your weight

- Choose a diet with plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits
- Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol
- Choose a diet moderate in sugars
- Choose a diet moderate in salt and sodium
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation

Healthy Weight Control

There continues to be a wide variety of advice concerning the best way to approach weight control. National surveys indicate that the American population has an increasing number of people who are overweight or obese among adults and children. This trend occurs even though the health risks associated with obesity are well substantiated and understood. In spite of the many weight loss programs and large amounts of money spent, the long term maintenance of weight loss is less than 5 percent. The prevailing opinion among health professionals is that prevention of weight gain should be emphasized. At the same time, people who are overweight should not abandon efforts to lose weight. Sometimes a weight loss of 10 or 20 pounds reduces risks for coronary heart disease or diabetes. It is important to increase physical activity to balance with the food you eat. Even the elderly can regain lean muscle by exercise. Living a healthy lifestyle by following the Food Guide Pyramid and the Dietary Guidelines plus getting adequate physical activity is important at any weight and any age.

Aging and Nutrition

The nutritional requirements of healthy, active, older adults are the same as for younger adults. There are, however, physiological changes that occur with aging which can increase or decrease the need for nutrients. According to the Surgeon General's Report, "Although specific nutritional problems have been documented among older Americans, the relationship of diet to morbidity and mortality in this age group is not always clear. What is clear is that prevention of many of the health problems of old age must necessarily begin much earlier in life." Some of the nutritional problems of the elderly are balancing energy needs and adequate exercise. Also important are getting adequate protein, calcium and iron. Older adults should evaluate vitamin intake and supplementation. Eating a nutrient dense diet is important because of the reduced need for energy and the tendency for less efficient utilization of nutrients. Medications may interact with some nutrients. Multiple medications especially are a concern.

To Snack or Not

Snacking is an All-American activity. The busy lifestyle that many families lead doesn't allow for three family meals. Unfortunately, we often associate snacking with high fat, high calorie foods. Well chosen snacks can add substantially to the nutrient content of your diet. The Food Guide Pyramid food groups provide a good guide in planning snacks for the day. Common snack foods such as crackers, popcorn, and granola are from the bread and cereal group, the foundation of the Pyramid. The fruit and vegetable groups provide many choices raw, dried or juiced. They are usually easily carried for healthy snacks away from home. Choose lowfat options from the dairy and meat groups. Lowfat yogurt, milk, or cheese and jerky, hard boiled eggs or cooked, sliced chicken are examples. Evaluating your snacking habits to improve nutrient content can be done by keeping a food record for a few days.

Fast Foods

Fast food consumption has increased over the last few years and appears to fit our busy lifestyles. It is convenient, quick, inexpensive, predictable and it tastes great; but can fast food be healthy food? The answer is yes with some tips to trim fat and add nutrients.

- Burgers come in a variety of sizes and with a lot of different toppings. Generally, the smaller the burger and the fewer the toppings, the lower the calories, fat and sodium.
- Add cheese for more calcium.
- Add tomato for more Vitamin A and Vitamin C.
- Ask for a whole wheat bun when it is available.
- Omit the mayonnaise or special sauce to cut fat.
- Share an order of French fries.
- Limit salad dressing at the salad bar.
- Try some of the special lower fat selections.

Even though there are many lower fat items on the menu, eating fast foods can contribute a lot of fat to the diet. Remember that you still hold the responsibility for making food choices. The frequency of eating fast foods can be controlled. You may alternate a brown bag lunch with fast foods. Knowledge about the nutrient content of fast foods is readily available and can give a good basis for other food selections for the day.

Vitamin Supplements

Study results show that about one-third of the adults in the United States take some nutrition supplement. Most people who take vitamin supplements also have a good diet which supplies most of the nutrients required.

There may be some people who could benefit from taking a supplement. For example, women of child bearing age may benefit from supplemental iron and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding may need supplemental folacin, iron and calcium. People who eat a limited number of calories such as severe dieters and older people can benefit from taking supplements as would strict vegetarians who don't eat a variety of foods. Supplementation is needed when disease limits eating or absorption of nutrients; or when medications interfere with the ability of nutrients. Calcium is commonly supplemented for older individuals or if milk consumption is limited due to intolerances or allergies.

There should be limits on the amount of a vitamin or mineral which is taken as a supplement. Generally, no more than 1 to 2 times the Recommended Dietary Allowance is suggested.

The cost of a supplement is no indication of its effectiveness.

Sports Nutrition

No matter what your level of participation in sports, nutrition is an important factor. The best sports nutrition program does not require a special training diet. Using the Food Guide Pyramid and the Dietary Guidelines is the best advice nutritionists can offer for sports enthusiasts as well as the general public. The food intake for a day should provide about 55-60 percent of the calories from carbohydrates (mostly high starch and high fiber foods), not more than 30 percent of the calories from fat with not more than 10 percent of that as saturated fat; and 10-15 percent for protein. The total calories needed may increase to provide for the additional physical activity. Eat a variety of different foods every day from the bread and cereal group, fruit and vegetable groups, milk group, and the meat group and control fats and sweets. Additional servings from the groups will provide additional calories. Plenty of carbohydrate will provide glucose and glycogen for quick energy. Usually there is enough glycogen in muscles to provide fuel for 90-120 minutes. Protein is important but no additional protein is advised since most adults are consuming about two times what is needed to maintain the tissues in the body. Before exercise some high carbohydrate food like fruit juice will provide glucose, water replacement is important during the exercise and after the carbohydrate stores may need to be replaced.