

SportsNutrition

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The Athlete's Kitchen

The new Food Pyramid has been unveiled for more than a year now. When I first saw it, my reaction was: "a missed opportunity." Since then, I've been waiting for the Pyramid's hidden messages to become clearer to me, but no such luck. Certainly, the government could have created a better tool to teach us how to make dietary improvements and promote healthful eating?

I've heard the Pyramid was designed to be simple. But it is so simple it seems meaningless! One reason for this simplicity (a.k.a. *vagueness*) relates to behind-the-scenes politics. The Pyramid was shaped not only by a team of scientists, nutrition experts and health professionals, but also by lobbyists from the sugar, soft drink, red meat, dairy and other food industries who fought to protect their turf. They know a small shift in dietary recommendations can mean billions of dollars of lost money. Hence, no hierarchy of food images appears in the new Pyramid. That is, an image with one food placed above another could get interpreted as that food being preferable and superior.

To find out more about the Pyramid's hidden messages, I went to www.MyPyramid.gov. This website, in contrast to the icon, offers an impressive amount of helpful information. Surfing to this treasure chest of information is a worthwhile use of time. Here is some of what I learned:

- Each wedge in the Pyramid represents a different food group. The orange stands for grains; green, for vegetables; red, for fruit; yellow, for oil; blue, for dairy; and purple, for meat and protein-rich foods.
- The variety of colorful wedges symbolizes the variety of foods that we need to form a balanced diet.
- The wedges have a broad base and a narrow top. This symbolizes we should choose portion sizes that vary according to our calorie needs. No longer is the message "one size fits all."
- The wedges also suggest we should eat a big base of nutrient dense foods and taper off our intake of foods with less nutritional value, including foods with fats and sugars. (That is, eat more apples, less apple pie; enjoy more baked potato, fewer potato chips.)
- The stairs symbolize the message of taking small steps to a healthier lifestyle.
- The person running up the stairs symbolizes the importance of daily exercise. (The one clear message?)

Climbing the Food Pyramid

• The person also symbolizes the Pyramid can be personalized. That is, at www.MyPyramid.gov, you can get a food plan based on your estimated calorie needs. (Mind you, these calorie suggestions do not take into account your height or weight; just your age and level of activity.) The website offers excellent information including tips to help you eat more of the foods that will invest in good health.

• With your personalized on-line food plan, you can learn how much to eat of each type of food. The guidelines for an 1,800 calorie food plan (a minimal amount for most athletes) are:

Fruit: 1.5 cups of fruit and or juice per day. This is easy for athletes: A smoothie with a banana, berries and orange juice will do that job!

Vegetables: 2.5 cups per day, with a variety of colors. A salad tossed with tomato, peppers, carrots and baby spinach fulfills the veggie requirement, no sweat!

Grains: Six ounces of grain foods, of which at least half are whole grain. (Look for *whole* before the grain name on the ingredient list.) One ounce = 1 slice bread or 1/2 cup pasta, rice. Eating whole grain Wheaties and rye bread balances the dinner's white pasta.

Dairy: 3 cups lowfat or fat-free milk or yogurt. Two ounces of cheese equates to one cup of milk.

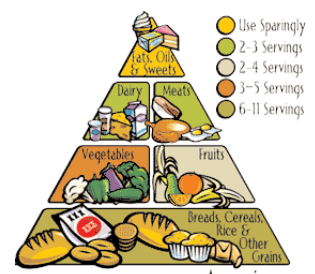
Meat and alternatives: 5 ounce equivalents. (One ounce of meat = 1 egg = 1 Tbsp peanut butter = 1/2 oz. nuts). This translates into a small portion at two meals/day.

The bottom line: Take mealtimes seriously; enjoy a variety of colorful foods; eat moderately & stay active.

2005 Food Pyramid



1992 Food Pyramid



Sports dietitian Nancy Clark MS, RD counsels casual and competitive athletes. Her private practice is at Healthworks, the premier fitness center in Chestnut Hill (617-383-6100). *Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook* (\$23), *Food Guide for Marathoners* (\$20) and *Cyclists' Food Guide* (\$20) are available via www.nancyclarkrd.com or by sending a check to Sports Nutrition Services, PO Box 650124, Newton MA 02465. Also see www.sportsnutritionworkshop.com.