

## GENERAL NUTRITION BACKGROUND

- It is important to establish healthy eating habits during childhood years since these habits may carry into adulthood. The “MyPyramid” Food Guidance System is a graphic symbol developed by the United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Health and Human Services to help consumers implement the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. MyPyramid emphasizes the need for a more individualized approach to improving diet and lifestyle.
- MyPyramid represents several important key concepts. The first is the need to take a **personalized approach** to diet and weight management, recognizing that one size does not fit all. To receive on-line personalized recommendations on the kinds and amounts of food to eat each day, go to <http://mypyramid.gov>, enter your personal information, and follow the prompts.
- We need to eat a **variety** of foods from every group in **balance** and **moderation**. The six color bands representing the five food groups and oils symbolize **variety**. Foods from all groups are needed each day for good health. Also choosing a variety from within each food group helps ensure you are getting the nutrients your body needs.
- Each food group has a wider base and narrows as it reaches the top. This represents **moderation**. The wider base stands for foods with little or no solid fats, added sugars, or caloric sweeteners. These foods should be eaten every day. Foods that contain more solid fats, added sugars, or caloric sweeteners belong at the top of the food section representing foods we should eat sometimes rather than every day. We need to achieve a balance between food and **regular physical activity** which is represented by the steps and the person climbing them as a reminder of the importance of daily physical activity.
- **Gradual improvement** is encouraged by the slogan "Steps to a Healthier You." It suggests that individuals can benefit from taking small steps to improve their diet and lifestyle each day.
- In these lessons, your students will learn that there are five major food groups and what foods go in each of the groups. All of the food groups work together to provide the essential nutrients our bodies need to grow and function properly. Since no one group or food can provide all the nutrients our bodies need, it is important to eat foods from each group and to eat a variety of foods within each group.
- The first section of MyPyramid, which is orange, represents the Grain group. Foods that are made from grains such as wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal and barley belong in this group. For example, bread, pasta, oatmeal, breakfast cereals, tortillas, and grits all belong in the grain group. This group provides complex carbohydrates (giving us energy), fiber, vitamins (especially B vitamins) and minerals. It is highly recommended to eat whole grains from this group rather than refined grains. MyPyramid recommends, *"Make half your grains whole"*.
- The Vegetable group of MyPyramid is green and the Fruit group is red. The Vegetable and Fruit groups provide important vitamins (such as vitamin A, C and folate), minerals (such as potassium, magnesium, iron) and fiber. In addition to valuable vitamins and minerals, phytochemicals from fruits and vegetables can help

reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease and other chronic diseases. MyPyramid recommends, "*Vary your veggies*" and "*Focus on fruit*".

- The Milk group is blue and includes milk and milk products, such as yogurt and cheese. This group offers good sources of calcium, protein, vitamins and minerals. Calcium is critical for strong bones and healthy teeth and also essential for muscle and nerve functions. MyPyramid recommends, "*Get your calcium-rich foods*".
- The Meat and Beans group is purple and includes poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, nuts and seeds. It is commonly known as the protein group due to the high protein content of the food items in this group. Protein not only rebuilds cells in organs, muscles, tendons, ligaments, hair and nails, but it also contributes to the formation of enzymes, antibodies and hormones. MyPyramid recommends, "*Go lean with protein*", which refers to primarily selecting lower fat choices from this group.
- The oils section of MyPyramid is yellow. It is a thin band representing the need to limit our oil intake, but at the same time acknowledging that some oils have health benefits. Oils include fats that are liquid at room temperature and are obtained from many different plants, such as canola, corn, olive, soybean and sunflowers, and oils from fish. Some foods are naturally high in oils, like nuts, olives, some fish, and avocados. Foods that are mainly oil include mayonnaise, certain salad dressings, and soft margarine.
- A certain amount of calories are needed to keep your body functioning and to provide energy for physical activity. MyPyramid recommends you get most of these calories from nutrient-dense foods. Foods containing solid fats and added sugars should be counted as discretionary calories.
- The **discretionary calorie allowance** is the amount of calories remaining after meeting your nutrient needs from the food groups in the pyramid. Choosing foods that are fat-free or lowfat and with no added sugars will make more room for discretionary calories. MyPyramid suggests there is not a lot of room for high-fat and high-sugar foods in a healthy energy-balanced diet.
- The amount of foods to be eaten daily from each food group depends on your age, gender and activity level. For children the recommendations are generally:
  - Eat 2-4 servings of fruits;
  - 3-5 servings of vegetables;
  - 3-6 servings of grains (half of which should be whole grains);
  - 3 servings of Milk group foods (choose fat-free or lowfat milk, yogurt and cheese);
  - 2 servings of protein-containing foods (e.g. meat, fish, chicken, eggs, beans);
  - Limit high fat/sugar foods.
- Children also need to be active for at least 60 minutes every day.