

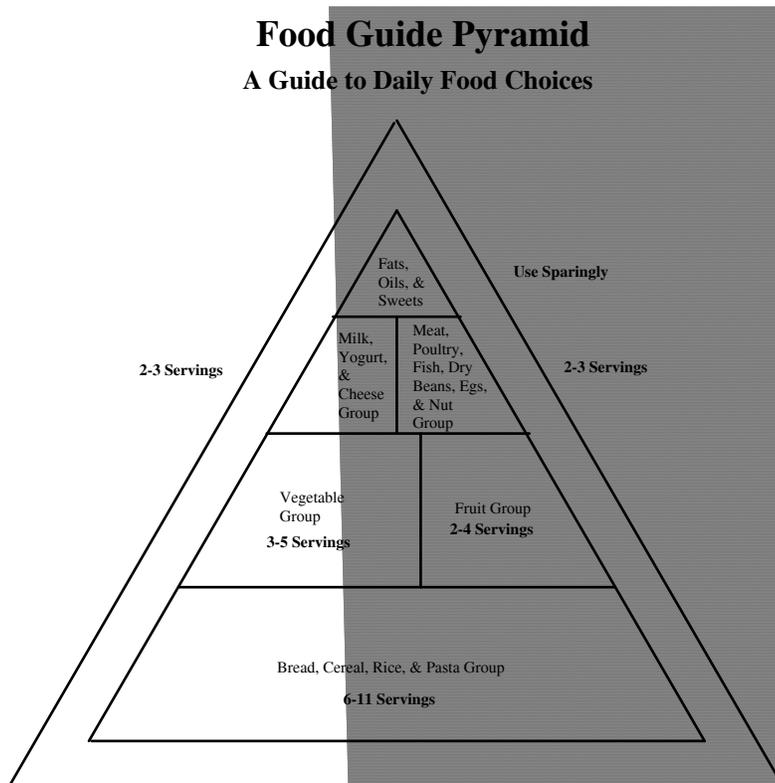
Fuel Up On Food Basics

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We expect karate to put us into great physical shape. We miss the mark in assuming that well-trained muscles are all we need to attain our goal. Race car drivers know that having a good vehicle is only half of a winning strategy. The right fuel mix is needed to get the most out of a fine-tuned engine. Additionally, the driver needs to assure that the spark plugs are clean and fire efficiently. Just as high performance cars require a combination of quality materials working together, we need quality fuel, food, in proper proportions for our body to perform at its peak.

Eating is a reflex habit for many Americans. It requires little more than opening the refrigerator and eating what suits our mood. Our lives have changed considerably from the days when much effort was spent in obtaining and preparing food. The explosion of fast, instant, ready-to-eat foods bears witness to this generation of adults who are often unable to prepare basic foods. Our knowledge of nutrition tends to be focused by the needs of manufacturers and advertisers marketing foods or supplements. Their spotlight is on the 'hot' issue of the day, be it oatbran, cholesterol, seas or antioxidants. Given the numerous food choices available, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of human nutrition. Keep in mind that personal foods choice are formed by many influences such as family habits, foods available, social settings, as well as a conscious choice to find the "healthiest" training fuel.

You can assess the quality of your diet by categorizing foods by their major nutrient contributions. Generally six groups are used to group food. In 1992, a daily food guide represented in the shape of a pyramid replaced the traditional Basic 4 Food Groups.



Carbohydrates

A pyramid shape suggests that the basis of your diet is grain and starch based. These flours, pasta, rice and other plant foods provide carbohydrate which is converted into fuel (glucose) shortly after eating.

For hard training, athletes, various methods of carbohydrate “loading” to maintain maximum sustained energy are used.

Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits are also pure sources of carbohydrate, fructose or fruit sugar. Fruit is a major source of vitamins such as vitamin C and A and fiber. Vegetables are relatively low in carbohydrate (fuel) but are concentrated in vitamins and minerals and fiber. Generally, the darker colored the vegetable, the more nutrient-dense it is such as carrots, broccoli or greens.

Proteins

Animal and plant foods (beans, legumes, lentils) supply the protein needed to build and repair muscle and other body tissues. Protein foods supply minerals such as iron or zinc. A typical American diet is meat based and contains much excess protein. Excess protein converts to glucose and is used as fuel or saved as fat. Three to six ounces of animal protein generously meets the needs of most athletes.

Dairy and Soy

Dairy or soy products supply protein and calcium along with other minerals. Dairy foods vary greatly in fat and carbohydrate (fuel) content. They contain major amounts of minerals. Soy milk and soy protein, though less familiar to Americans, are diet staples in Asian cultures. Soy proteins have unique beneficial qualities. So potent are the active substances in soy proteins that the National Institute of Health has ongoing clinical trials using forms of soy protein for cancer tumor prevention.

Fats and Sugars

Fats, oils and sugars barely need to be mentioned. They are tasty and are prone to be over eaten. Small amounts of fats are needed for vitamin absorption and other cellular mechanics. A fat deficiency problem is rarely seen in the general population.

Water

Water is a critical nutrient not mentioned in the pyramid, none-the-less important on a daily basis. One or two quarts of pure water in addition to coffee, tea, soda, or juices is optimal. Fortunately, the trend in selling bottled water has helped increase its attractiveness, otherwise we take it for granted. For many people, drinking plain water is a challenge. Fortunately water drinking can be come addictive for the person trying to substitute water for sodas or other popular drinks.

Variety and Balance

Information abounds regarding food groups and nutrients. There is no lack of popular debate in the world of nutrition. Health food fads come and go. What is useful is to periodically assess ones own eating habits against a simple guide such as the Food Pyramid. Eating a variety of foods helps to ensure one is meeting their nutrient needs. Sweets and “junk” food calories can guilelessly be eaten if the diet has a solid foundation. Choosing a variety of foods and adjusting amounts to meet personal energy needs is a sane away of balancing our diet as we change with age and activity. For a high performance diet, eat a nutrient rich, hearty combination of foods. Eating a wholesome, high carbohydrate diet will enhance your sport performance and protect your health.

Tip: Eat a piece of fruit with peanut and stoned wheat crackers with milk for a hearty, nutrient rich snack.