

Rebuilding the Food Pyramid

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After college I noticed my hour glass figure taking on the shape of the food pyramid, wide at the base and narrow at the top, also known as “pear shaped”. It’s funny how our bodies can be labeled into simple shapes identified by fruits. Many of us can be described as a pear or apple shape.

This brings me to the U.S. Department of Agriculture food pyramid which was first developed due to an increase of heart disease in Americans. Lets look at a brief history of national recommendations for nutrition.

- 1894 was the first US dietary recommendations to the nation, before vitamins and minerals were discovered.
- 1916 food was divided into 5 groups: milk/meat, cereals, vegetables/fruits, fats/fatty foods and sugar/sugary.
- 1941 the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) based around caloric intake and essential nutrients was introduced for the men at war to avoid scurvy.
- 1943 the basic 4 was then popularized Milk, Meats, Fruits/vegetables and Grains due to shortage during the war.
- 1970 in response to an increase in chronic disease the 5 food groups guide was re-developed

• 1992 the pyramid graphic was designed to help explain the 1970’s 5 food groups

Back to my pear shape and how I can reclaim that hour glass figure. This might sound like vanity but it really is important for my health and longevity.



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Here are improvements that have been proposed for each level of the pyramid.

1) The vegetables are second on the list, they should be first.

2) Not all fats are bad for you. Eliminate the saturated and trans fats in grain fed beef and potato chips which increase heart disease.

Increase the monosaturated and polyunsaturated fats found in olive oil, grape seed oil, avocados and sesame seeds. Coconut milk, one of the good saturated fats is beneficial for cardiovascular health and in decreasing inflammation. Minimize your solid fat intake of butter and lard. Avoid highly processed and hydrogenated fats such as margarine.

3) The pyramid recommends 6-8 servings of carbohydrates. That is one of the reasons I started to look like a pyramid. Unless your everyday consists of heavy physical labor, this amount can lead to obesity and diabetes. There are two main classes of carbohydrates to consider: simple (bad) carbs like “white bread”, which raise blood sugar rapidly and have lost all their vitamins and minerals in processing. Then there are complex (good) carbs like oatmeal from oat groats, which are loaded with fiber and retain most of their natural vitamins and minerals. Servings of good carbs should be 2-3.

4) Whole fruit, cleaned of pesticide residues and eaten, skin and all, will help with digestion and provide vitamins. The pyramid does recommend 2 cups of fruit a day. I would not use juice unless the pulp and fiber is still in the drink otherwise the concentrated sugars spike blood sugar adding to

body fat and stressing your insulin production.

5) Protein is very important: it is found in legumes, nuts, seeds and meats. Red meat that is grass fed, has balanced omega 3:6 fatty acids much like a salmon. Increase your small fish consumption to support your need for balanced fatty acids while minimizing your mercury exposure. If vegetarian, make sure your vegetable, nuts and legume combinations are with most meals to ensure a complete protein intake.

6) Minimize or eliminate dairy products. Calcium can also be found in dark leafy greens, such as spinach and broccoli. Vitamin D is produced when sunlight strikes our skin, and should be supplemented in the NW during winter. Dairy has been tied to many food allergies, chronic sinus infections and increased mucus production, which all can inhibit your absorption of vitamins and minerals.

7) One category that is not addressed by the food pyramid is the fermented; probiotic foods that support healthy gut flora populations in your intestines. These are traditionally preserved foods as Kim chi, yogurt, miso, and sauerkraut.



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