

# the new food pyramid

## clinical information for practitioners and patients

Eating habits of Australians were determined by the Australian Food and Nutrition Monitoring Unit from 1990-1999. Some concerning facts include:

- Only 22% of women and 15% of men ate 4 serves or more of vegetables daily (we should be eating 5-7 serves)
- The majority of men eat only one serve or less of fruit daily
- 63.7% of men and 47% of women are overweight or obese
- At least 50% of females consume less than the recommended daily intake (RDI) of calcium and iron and 25% of all females did not meet the folate RDI (let alone the extra folate needed for pregnancy)

The aim of this information sheet is to provide sensible guidelines to improve on these worrying statistics.

Everyone growing up with a box of cereal on his or her breakfast table will be familiar with the Australian Healthy Eating Pyramid to a 'balanced' diet, launched by The Australian Nutrition Foundation in 1982. It advised to; 'Eat Most' – Vegetables, dried peas, beans and lentils, cereals, bread, fruit, nuts; 'Eat moderately' – lean meat, eggs, fish, chicken, milk, yoghurt, cheese; 'Eat in small amounts' – oil, margarine, reduced-fat spreads, butter, sugar. These recommendations are very general, lumping a lot of different foods into the 'Eat Most' category without any specific guidelines regarding healthy carbohydrates, proteins or fats, nor the proportion they should make up in a healthy, disease-preventing diet. In 1992 the U.S. Department of Agriculture released a similar Food Guide Pyramid that minimised consumption of fats and oils but promoted six to 11 servings a day of foods rich in low-fat complex carbohydrates - bread, cereal, rice, pasta etc.

Since 1992 growing research has shown that these pyramids are flawed. By promoting all complex carbohydrates and eschewing all fats and oils, the pyramid is misleading. In short, not all fats are bad for you, and by no means are all complex carbohydrates good for you. For example, studies have shown that a high intake of starchy carbohydrate from refined grains and potatoes is associated with a high risk of type 2 diabetes, obesity and coronary heart disease. Conversely, a greater intake of fibre from whole grains is related to a lower risk of these illnesses. A high trans-fat intake is the greatest contributor to poor cholesterol and triglyceride status, followed by saturated fat and

high glycaemic carbohydrates. Mono and polyunsaturated fats (from nuts, seeds, avocado and fish) have consistently been shown to prevent disease. Studies show that nuts improve blood cholesterol ratios, lower the risk of heart disease and diabetes. People who eat nuts are actually less likely to be obese!

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***The best way to avoid obesity is to LIMIT YOUR TOTAL CALORIES, not just the fat calories or the carbohydrate calories.***

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The 'old' pyramids are currently being reassessed. In the meantime, a 'new' food pyramid has been suggested by leading scientists and nutritionists to reflect the current understanding of the relation between diet, health and disease prevention. The following **New Food Pyramid** is based on these recommendations, with the addition of a few more 'whole food' suggestions.

One of the **New Food Pyramid** recommendations is to eat vegetables in abundance. People who eat lots of fruit and vegetables have a lower incidence of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cardiovascular disease, some cancers, children with birth defects, cataracts and degeneration of the retina. Fruits and vegetables are the primary source of many vitamins and antioxidants needed for good health. Being mainly starch, potatoes do not confer the benefits seen for other vegetables.

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***Research has shown that men and women eating in accordance with THE NEW PYRAMID had a lower risk of major chronic disease.***

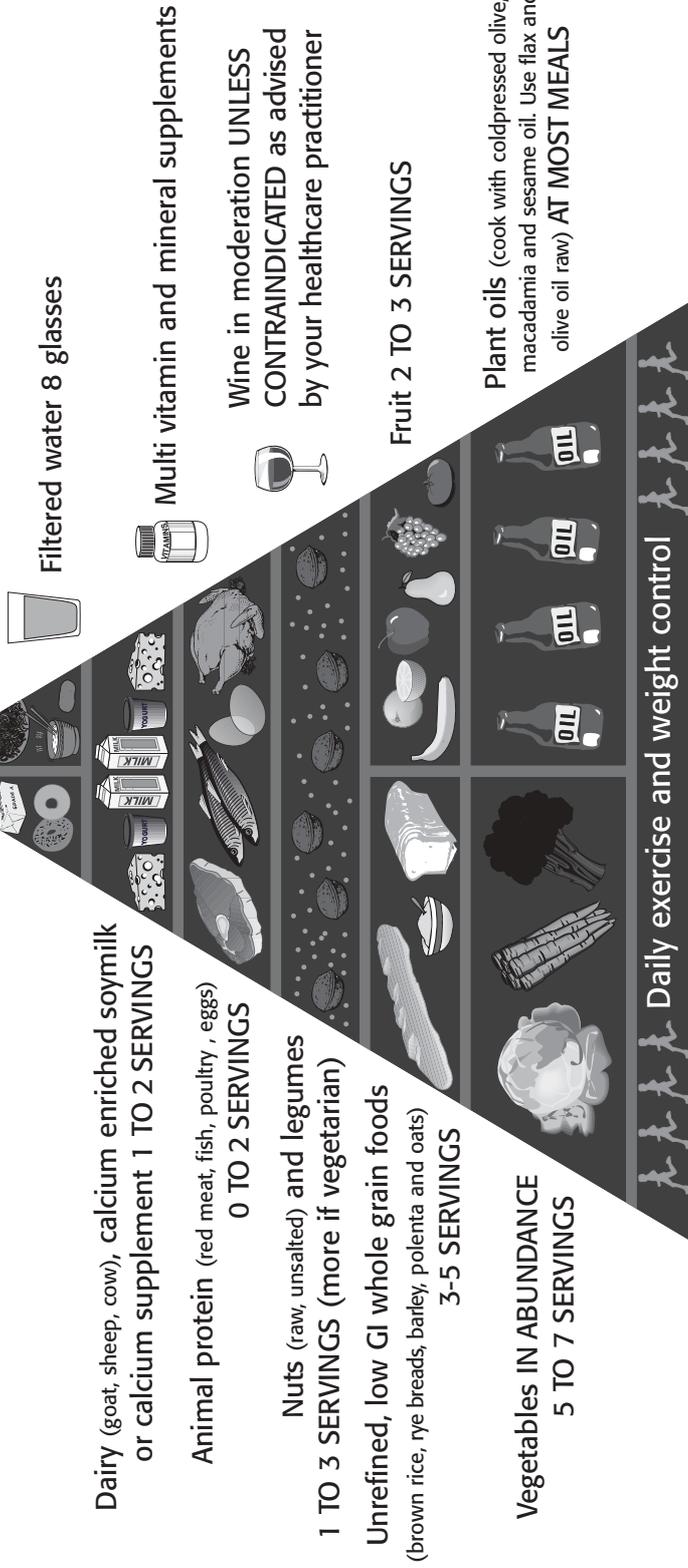
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The **New Food Pyramid** reduces the amount of dairy products previously recommended. The highest rates of fractures are found in countries with high dairy consumption, whereas fruit and vegetable intake is associated with a higher bone density. What is more, men who consume large amounts of dairy products or calcium have an increased risk of prostate cancer and women with high intakes have increased risk of ovarian cancer. Under some circumstances people may need to fortify their diet with other calcium-rich foods and/or with a calcium supplement (eg. Menopause). (See Nutrimericine Dairy-free information sheet)

# NEW FOOD PYRAMID

Altered fats, deep fried foods, margarine, trans fats, hydrogenated fats and butter **AVOID**

White rice, white bread, potatoes, pasta, sweets and sugar **AVOID**



Dairy (goat, sheep, cow), calcium enriched soymilk or calcium supplement 1 TO 2 SERVINGS

Animal protein (red meat, fish, poultry, eggs) 0 TO 2 SERVINGS

Nuts (raw, unsalted) and legumes 1 TO 3 SERVINGS (more if vegetarian)

Unrefined, low GI whole grain foods (brown rice, rye breads, barley, polenta and oats) 3-5 SERVINGS

Vegetables IN ABUNDANCE 5 TO 7 SERVINGS

Daily exercise and weight control  
Organic produce whenever possible

## WHAT COUNTS AS A SERVING?

### Bread, Cereal, Rice, and Pasta

- 1 slice of bread, 1 small roll, 1/2 bagel or English muffin, 1 small muffin
- 1 ounce (30g) of ready to-eat cereal, 1/2 cup of cooked cereal, rice, or pasta

### Vegetable

- 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables, 1/2 cup of other vegetables, cooked or chopped raw, 3/4 cup of vegetable juice

### Fruit

- 1 medium apple, banana, orange, 1/2 cup of chopped, cooked, or canned fruit, 1/2 cup berries, 3/4 cup of fruit juice, 1/4 cup dried fruit

### Milk, Yoghurt, and Cheese

- 1 cup of milk or yoghurt, 1-1 1/2 ounces (30-45g) of natural cheese, 1/2 cup ricotta cheese, 2 ounces (60g) of processed cheese, 2 cups cottage cheese

### Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs, and Nuts

- 2-3 ounces (60-90g) of cooked lean meat, poultry or fish, 1/2 cup of cooked dry beans or tofu, 2 tablespoons of peanut butter, 1/3 cup nuts, 1/4 cup seeds or 1 egg counts as 1 ounce (30g) of lean meat.

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