



BACKGROUND

United States Department of Agriculture • Office of Communications • 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1300 • Voice: (202) 720-4623 • Email: oc.news@usda.gov • Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

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Backgrounder for Revision of Food Guide Pyramid
Sept. 10, 2003

History: In 2000 USDA initiated a comprehensive reassessment of the Food Guide Pyramid (FGP), which was originally released in 1992. USDA has provided food guidance to the American public for over 100 years, and the Pyramid is the current graphic representation of this guidance. The Pyramid's scientific underpinning incorporated three key elements—recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), recommended levels of nutrient intake as expressed in the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) published by the National Academy of Sciences, and actual food consumption patterns of Americans as documented in USDA food consumption surveys. The Pyramid's graphical presentation was developed to communicate key messages to consumers, and multiple presentations were tested with consumers prior to release to identify which graphical image communicated these messages most effectively.

Purpose: The Food Guide Pyramid is an educational tool to help Americans select healthful diets. The current reassessment and update of the Pyramid was undertaken to assure that its recommendations continue to meet current nutritional standards and that consumers can understand and apply its messages.

Components: The Food Guide Pyramid reassessment and updating process includes three phases. The first phase consists of gathering information through technical research, professional input, and consumer research. The second phase involves updating of the Pyramid food guidance recommendations, and the third involves developing new or revised graphic and educational materials.

Phase 1: Information gathering

Technical Research: Technical research compares Pyramid food intake patterns to current nutritional standards. The major nutritional standards used for comparison are the Dietary Reference Intakes issued by the National Academy of Science Institute of Medicine, and the current Dietary Guidelines. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines will be reflected in the updated Pyramid when they become available. The Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI) have replaced the former Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA). Between 1997 and 2001, the Institute of Medicine has issued DRIs for 28 vitamins and minerals. In August 2002, the DRI report on macronutrients was released with recommendations for energy (calories), carbohydrates, fiber, fats, specific fatty acids and protein. All of these new nutritional standards are being used to assess and revise Pyramid food intake patterns.

An additional aspect of the technical research involves updating data about the nutritional content of American diets to reflect present consumption patterns and the nutrient content of individual foods. These data are then used in the process of comparing proposed food intake patterns to nutritional standards.

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Professional input: Input is being sought from professionals in the community, to draw on their expertise in the use of the Pyramid. These professionals include dietitians and nutritionists, educators, academics, industry representatives, advocates and government scientists. Forums and presentations at professional meetings and journal articles are being used to solicit input for the information-gathering phase of the reassessment. Contacts will continue throughout all phases of the reassessment and updating process. Opportunities will be made available for professionals to share their concerns or recommendations, and to comment on proposed revisions before they are finalized.

Consumer research: Qualitative consumer research is being used to identify how consumers understand and use the Pyramid, and the barriers they face in trying to use it to make food choices. To gather baseline information, a series of focus groups with adult consumers was held in several locations across the United States in the summer of 2002. This information will help in designing Pyramid-related, consumer educational materials that are more clear and useful.

Phase 2: Updating Pyramid food guidance recommendations

Pyramid food intake patterns are being updated so that they meet current nutritional standards and reflect changes in food choices among Americans. Pyramid food patterns consist of the types and amounts of foods to eat and are specific to consumers' age/gender groups. New DRI energy intake recommendations are being used in developing revised food patterns. In addition, the new food patterns are being targeted to meet all of the new DRI recommendations for vitamins, minerals and macronutrients. The proposed new food patterns have been developed in consultation with HHS staff and other USDA scientists. USDA will also present the proposed food intake patterns to the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee for discussion and to obtain their input. Updated DGA recommendations will be incorporated when available.

Phase 3: Developing new consumer materials

New graphic and consumer messages will be developed and tested using the revised food patterns and information gathered from Phase 1. The major goal of this phase is to create a graphical representation and materials that communicate Pyramid recommendations in ways that consumers can understand and act on them. The new graphic and consumer messages will also be tested with consumers and released for public comment through the *Federal Register* before they are finalized. Release of an updated Food Guide Pyramid with actionable, consumer-friendly materials is targeted for early 2005. The projected Pyramid reassessment timeline follows.

Projected Food Guide Pyramid Reassessment Timeline:

Winter-Spring 2003	Technical research to develop proposed revisions to Pyramid food pattern.
Fall 2003	Proposed revisions to Pyramid food patterns published in <i>Federal Register</i> for peer review and public comment.
Fall-Winter 2003/2004	Analysis of FR comments and further revision of Pyramid food patterns. Conceptualization and preliminary design of new graphic and consumer materials. The process for updating the Pyramid will be coordinated with the activities of the DGAC.
Spring 2004	Consumer testing of proposed new graphic and consumer messages.
Summer 2004	Proposed new Pyramid graphic and consumer messages published in <i>Federal Register</i> for public comment.
Winter 2005	Finalization and clearance of revised Pyramid graphic and consumer materials.