

(Embargoed until Sept. 10)
Questions and Answers about the Food Guide Pyramid
Sept. 10, 2003

1) What is the Food Guide Pyramid?

The Pyramid is an educational tool to help Americans select healthful diets. The Pyramid meets the needs of healthy individuals over 2 years of age for nutrients (such as vitamins and minerals) without too much fat, cholesterol, sugar and sodium. The Pyramid may not meet the needs of those with specific health concerns, since it is designed for healthy individuals over 2 years of age. Consumers with specific needs should consult with a medical professional. The Pyramid translates nutrition recommendations—the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI)—into the kinds and amounts of food to eat each day.

USDA has had historic responsibility for guiding consumer food choices for the last 100 years. The Pyramid is the latest version of food guidance developed to help consumers interpret the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the cornerstone of federal nutrition policy.

2) What is the scientific basis for the Food Guide Pyramid?

USDA uses current, authoritative scientific information from a variety of data sources including information on the U.S. nutritional status, nutritional standards, food consumption practices, food availability and food composition. The overall project to revise the Pyramid is a comprehensive effort that is designed to help Americans make healthful daily food choices, based on the consensus of scientific experts from scientific panels and committees including the Committee on the Scientific Evaluation of the Dietary Reference Intakes (the DRI Committee) of the Food and Nutrition Board, Institute of Medicine and the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee.

3) Why is a *Federal Register* notice on the Food Guide Pyramid being posted?

USDA is calling for written comments on the proposed updating to the Food Guide Pyramid's scientific foundation--its daily food intake patterns (i.e. what and how much the Pyramid suggests to eat). Written comments will be accepted for 45 days from the date of publication of the *Federal Register* notice. Once the comment period closes, all input received will be considered in formulating the final daily food intake patterns for the Pyramid. Then, work on the graphic presentation of the Pyramid and consumer materials will be initiated. Posting of a second *Federal Register* notice to obtain public comment on the updated food guide graphic is planned for 2004.

4) How can I submit comments on the *Federal Register* notice?

Submit written comments to Food Guide Pyramid Reassessment Team, USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 1034, Alexandria, VA 22302. Comments are only being accepted through mail or delivery services, there is no provision for accepting comments electronically.

5) What are the Dietary Guidelines for Americans?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), first released in 1980 and revised in 1985, 1990, 1995 and again in 2000, are published jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The DGA provide the basis for federal nutrition policy that effects nutrition assistance programs including the school lunch program and other programs, and federal nutrition education messages.

6) What is the relationship between the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans represent federal nutrition policy, and the Food Guide Pyramid is an educational tool to help consumers make food choices for a healthy diet. The Pyramid is developed and issued by USDA in coordination with DHHS. The Pyramid has been incorporated into the Dietary Guidelines. The 1995 Guideline “Eat a variety of foods,” which featured the Pyramid as the means to follow this advice, was modified to “Let the Pyramid guide your food choices” in the year 2000 Guidelines. The Pyramid translates the principles of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and other nutritional standards and interprets them into healthy food choices. The updated Pyramid will be consistent with the 2005 revision of the Dietary Guidelines.

USDA has had historic responsibility for guiding consumer food choices for the last 100 years. The Pyramid is the latest version of food guidance developed to help consumers interpret the food policy document, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

7) What are the reasons for the revisions to the Pyramid and Guidelines?

In 2000, USDA undertook a multi-year, broad-based reassessment of the Pyramid, considering not only new nutritional standards and food consumption data, but also consumer understanding and use of the Pyramid and input from professionals who use the Pyramid in their work. We expect that the results of this reassessment will be the release of an updated Pyramid in 2005 in coordination with the release of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

The current updating effort was undertaken to ensure (1) that the Pyramid’s daily food intake patterns (what and how much to eat) continue to meet current nutritional standards and (2) that that consumers can understand and apply its messages. To reflect the most current science, the Dietary Guidelines are updated every five years.

8) What is the timeline for the revision of the Food Guide Pyramid and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans?

The process for updating the Pyramid will be coordinated with the activities of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. While the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee is not responsible for revising the Food Guide Pyramid, the revisions of the Pyramid and the Dietary Guidelines are managed in a manner that will yield a coordinated and consistent outcome. We anticipate that the updated Pyramid will be released in 2005. The next edition (6th edition) of the Dietary Guidelines will be released jointly by USDA and HHS in early 2005. The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee that recommends revisions on the Guidelines to the government will begin its deliberations in 2003.

9) What changes do you anticipate making in the revision of the Food Guide Pyramid?

It is too early to know what changes will be made in Pyramid recommendations or graphic presentation. USDA is continuing to gather information from stakeholders and consumers, and completing the technical research phase of the reassessment. The *Federal Register* notice is scheduled to be published on Sept. 11. Written comments will be accepted for 45 days from the date of publication of the *Federal Register* notice. Once the comment period closes, USDA will consider all input received in formulating the revised daily food intake patterns for the Pyramid. USDA will also present the proposed daily food intake patterns to the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee for discussion and to obtain their input.

Work on the graphic presentation of the Pyramid and consumer materials will be initiated when the food intake patterns have been finalized. USDA plans to post a proposed updated food guide graphic in the *Federal Register* for public comment in 2004.

10) The *Federal Register* notice says that the proposed Pyramid is based on the 2002 Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) and the 2000 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA). Will the latest revisions of these documents be included in the final pyramid?

Yes. The DRI reports will be reflected in the Food Guide Pyramid. The National Academy of Science began a comprehensive effort of revising the DRIs and releasing a series of reports between 1997 through 2002. The current DRI panel is deliberating on the scientific data for electrolytes and water. This report will also be considered a data source for the Pyramid when it is released.

Yes. The final Pyramid will reflect new 2005 DGA recommendations when they become available, ensuring that all Federal dietary guidance remains consistent with the DGA.

11) Why doesn't the *Federal Register* notice include a graphic?

Currently, USDA is gathering information from stakeholders and consumers, and completing the technical research phase of the reassessment. It is too early to know what changes will be made in the Pyramid's graphic presentation.

12) Will the shape of the Food Guide Pyramid remain the same?

Currently, USDA is gathering information from stakeholders and consumers, and completing the technical research phase of the reassessment. It is too early to know what changes will be made in the Pyramid's graphic presentation.

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