

The Nutrition Reporter™

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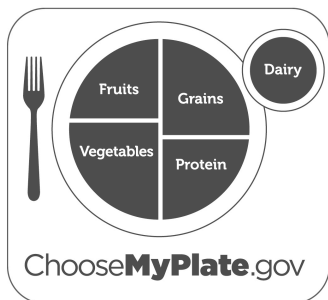
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The independent newsletter that reports vitamin, mineral, and food therapies

USDA Gives Nutrition Guidelines A Simpler Look – A Positive Step

In June, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) dumped its complicated and confusing food pyramids as guidelines for nutritional intake. There were too many pyramids for too many types of people, and many of the recommendations were more about representing the major food industries rather than providing sound nutritional guidance.

The new USDA recommendations take the form of a plate, which makes sense because people don't usually eat off pyramids. On the positive side, the plate offers refreshingly clear and simple guidelines – you don't need a PhD degree in nutrition to make sense of it. Still, it's questionable how many people will follow the guidelines. While the pyramids recommended huge amounts of grains (think carbohydrates and mostly empty calories), the plate now recommends large amounts of vegetables and fruits.



I would have created the plate a little differently, with about 50% of the plate consisting of vegetables, 20% fruit, 25% protein, and 5% grains. I'm not enthusiastic about the glass representing dairy, but it is certainly better than a soft drink. My hesitancy about grains and dairy are related to the fact that they are common allergens.

To its credit, the USDA pointed out that the plate is simply a guideline for eating. With three-fourths of Americans now overweight or obese, any kind of clear guideline for better eating habits is a step in the right direction.

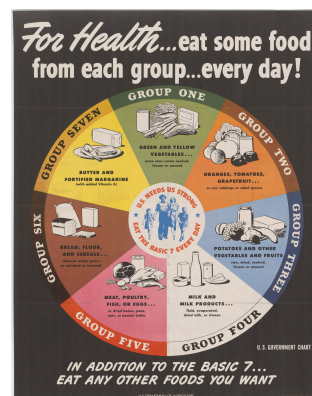
Nutrition should not be complicated. My own guidelines are to emphasize fresh foods and to minimize any kind of packaged food.

National Archives Unveils Food Exhibit

If you're planning to be in Washington, D.C., between now and the end of the year, it may be worthwhile to see the National Archives' exhibit, "What's Cooking, Uncle Sam?" The show focuses on the U.S. government's role in shaping the American diet, good and bad, and often with a dash of humor, thanks to the presence of now-antique food-related posters and advice.

The exhibit traces the government's role on the farm, the factory, the kitchen, and on the table. Some people might wonder about the need for governmental regulation in the food industry, but the quality of food in big cities was often suspect through the 19th and early 20th centuries – so bad that a public outcry eventually led to federal oversight.

One of my favorite posters, from World War II, depicts seven food groups, which represented food industries more than nutritional sense. We're currently down to four



food groups, through some consolidation. I might point out that, around the world, different countries have different numbers of food groups, which points to cultural and financial influences more than nutritional ones. Since I often write about vitamins, I have to point out one other unintentionally humorous poster, also dating from WW II. This one recommends "vitamin donuts" for

energy, thanks to it being fortified with vitamin B1. If you're left scratching your head, consider that vitamin deficiencies were common through the 1930s and beyond, and vitamin D was even added to hotdogs and beer.

People's views are shaped by the times they live in, and though many of the dietary recommendations of the past might now seem bizarre, they were considered acceptable, normal, or helpful back then.

Funding the Obvious in Nutrition Research

I certainly believe in funding nutrition research, but I do have my doubts when it comes to funding the obvious. Case in point: Earlier this year, Hyundai's Hope on Wheels program donated \$50,000 to a University of Arizona researcher to study whether good nutrition might have any effect on children undergoing chemotherapy for cancer. The rationale was that malnourished child cancer patients (or adult patients, for that matter) have more medical complications during chemotherapy, compared with children who have better diets.

Does anyone really believe that bad diets benefit anyone – whether a child or adult, or whether or not going through chemotherapy?

A single deficiency or marginal deficiency (now termed the euphemistic "insufficiency" by doctors and dietitians) impairs a huge swath of human biochemistry. USDA data indicates that vitamin and mineral deficiencies are common – not really surprising given the widespread consumption of junk foods, which displace more nutritious foods.

Aside from basic nutrition, recent studies have shown that giving children certain vitamin supplements (e.g., silymarin or vitamin E combined with N-acetylcysteine) helps manage their chemotherapy with fewer side effects. In my opinion, Hyundai would have done better to spend that money to ensure truly healthy food for some children, instead of the highly processed foods typically served in hospitals.

Something's Rotten in Denmark

The headline is a paraphrase from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but it does apply to the current government of Denmark. First, let me clearly state that I love Denmark and my Danish friends. It's a wonderful country – except when it comes to the government's regulation of vitamin supplements.

For reasons I fail to grasp, the Danish government views vitamin supplements as being dangerous, and so people have to be protected from them. The supplements on the shelves of Danish health food

stores and pharmacies are of ridiculously low potency, so low that one has to wonder whether they have any real biological effects.

Just recently, the Danish government banned some American cereals and a peculiar British food product called Marmite – because they were fortified with tiny amounts of vitamins that the Danish government thought were dangerous.

One official of the Danish version of the FDA was quoted by the *New York Times* as saying, "It's quite well documented that most vitamins are toxic, depending on the amount taken in."

My thought: If vitamins are so toxic, why aren't vitamin-gulping Americans and Brits dropping off like flies? I suggest that the Danish official do his best to avoid eating any foods containing vitamins. Coca-Cola, fries, and Big Macs should do fine.

Another Danish official was quoted as saying, "You won't see a lack of vitamins in the Danes, and the opinion of researchers is that they do not need further fortification."

My thought: This is quite a pronouncement, so I'll start simply. No Dane ever suffers from vitamin D deficiency during their long dark days of fall, winter and early spring, right?

Government officials, regardless of their country, are prone to grand and often stupid statements about the excellent nutritional health of their citizens. After all, what country wants to admit that nutritional deficiencies are common? So let's think about this scientifically. Without actually measuring blood levels of vitamins, no one would have any proof that "you won't see a lack of vitamins in the Danes." Or Brits. Or Germans. Or Americans. The statement is simply an assumption without proof.

Having undergone blood measurements of my vitamins, minerals, fatty acids, and amino acid levels, I was surprised by the results. Everyone, I believe, should have the opportunity to do the same. –*JC*

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