

Eating in the U.S.

A guide for health

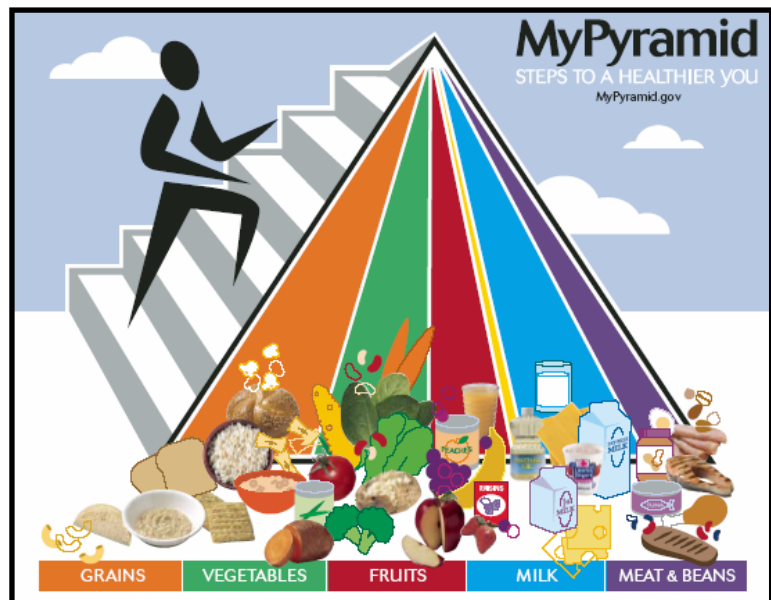
Coming to the United States can be both an exciting and frightening experience. There are many new things to which you will adapt. One important issue is food. Eating in the United States can be a fun and enjoyable experience. Food serves many purposes: it provides energy for our bodies, is part of socializing, comforts our emotions and has an impact on family time. You will find that food in the United States may be very different from your home country. Try new things! Taste everything at least once, then you can decide if you like it or not. The following information will outline healthy eating habits and address special nutrition concerns.

MyPyramid

MyPyramid is a tool, developed by the U.S. government that you can use to learn how to eat healthfully. By visiting the MyPyramid Web site at: www.mypyramid.gov, you can enter your age, gender, and activity level and receive a personalized estimate of what and how much you need to eat each day to stay healthy. MyPyramid consists of six colored bands which represent food groups and has steps up the side to emphasize physical activity. Listed below are the food groups that the colored bands of the pyramid represent.

- Orange – grains
- Green – vegetables
- Red – fruit
- Yellow – oils
- Blue – milk products
- Purple – meat and beans

The colored bands have a wide base, but narrow towards the top. The wider base stands for foods with little or no solid fats or added sugars, which should be selected more often. The narrower top stands for food containing more added sugars and solid fats, which should be selected less often. The different widths of the bands serve as a general guide about how much food a person should choose from each group.



MyPyramid image reprinted with permission from USDA and DHHS

For instance, a person would consume more grains servings each day (large band width) than they would oils (small band width). The MyPyramid Web site also offers tips about the types of foods within each group that are particularly important to consume. The dietary guidelines provide advice on how good dietary habits can promote health and reduce risk for major chronic diseases. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 is another set of nutrition guidelines for a healthy diet for people over the age of two years.

Fast food

As a new resident in the United States, you might notice an abundance of restaurants available to you for dining. Many of these restaurants may serve “fast food.” Fast food usually means the food is prepared ahead of time for you to eat.

Much fast food is deep fried in oil or cooked quickly on the grill. If you do not eat in restaurants often, try to make healthy choices. Fast food restaurants are continually adding healthy alternatives to their menus.

Nutrition data for many fast foods can be found online at Nutrition and Analysis Tool System (NATS) at: <http://nat.crgq.com/index.html> or at the specific restaurant's web page. If you are consuming fast food, be sure to eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, for a well-rounded healthy diet.

Prepared food

Prepared or convenience foods are also common in the United States. Examples are frozen dinners, rice and pasta mixes and soups. These items are generally packaged in a box or bag; you may add water to them, and heat them before eating. These foods are convenient for a person with a busy schedule, but they tend to be high in fat and sodium. You can check the nutrition labels or go online to NATS to compare fat and sodium quantities.

Residence hall dining

If you are living in a university residence hall on campus, you will probably do most of your dining in the cafeteria. The cafeteria has many options available to you. Available at lunch and dinner are a salad, sandwich, and soup bar, hot meals, and a variety of seasonings and spices to adapt foods to meet your tastes. If you would like to have any special items put on the menu, you can fill out a comment card with your suggestion. Remember, the staff is there to help you make your dining experience enjoyable and to answer any questions you might have.

Explore your options within the residence halls. The university's "free-flow" dining service allows you to eat any meal in any residence hall dining location. The university residence halls also have a program called "Specialty Restaurants." Every day of the week, there is a different restaurant that focuses on a specific type of food (such as Mexican or Italian). Additionally, every weekday for lunch, vegetarian food is served at Field of Greens Restaurant in the Lincoln Avenue Residence Hall (LAR).

Information on daily menus, dining locations, and hours (including those of specialty restaurants) is available online at <http://www.housing.uiuc.edu/dining/> (the University Dining and Catering Web site). Nutrition information is also available at that Web site for each menu item. Simply click on the menu item desired, from the Menu page, and the nutrition information will be displayed. Symbols are also included with the nutrition information to identify items that contain no pork or pork products, are heart healthy, vegetarian or spicy.

You may also want to visit local farmer's markets during the warm weather (June through October) held at different locations throughout Champaign-Urbana.

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: <http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu>