

## The *Wise Choices Food Pyramid*: What if We Did Compare Apples and Oranges?

With our more sedentary lives and readily available food, Americans' waistlines are growing and chronic diseases related to nutrition – diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers – are on the rise. Our abundant diets are relatively *less* healthy than those of the past. These trends make it important to learn to make better choices among the many foods available in grocery stores and at meal times. The goal of our project was to create a visual guide to healthy foods. The *Wise Choices Food Pyramid*, helps individuals make better nutritional choices.

Historically, whole foods have been categorized into food groups according to their shared essential nutrients. The USDA *MyPyramid*<sup>1</sup> illustrates the need for variety, moderation, and balance among the basic groups of grains, vegetables, fruits, oils, dairy, meat and beans, and discretionary calories (formerly called “extras”).

The *Wise Choices Food Pyramid* provides additional visual guidance within a food group to help an individual select foods that supply the most nutritional benefit. Within each of the groups, foods in the *Wise Choices Pyramid* are ranked from left to right, according to their contributions of beneficial and essential nutrients. These rankings help individuals follow the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*<sup>2</sup> recommendation to “choose wisely within a food group.” The *Wise Choices Food Pyramid* is

based on the most current scientific information now available on healthy diets and “functional foods.”

***Functional foods* are foods or parts of food – such as nutrients – that go beyond basic nutrition and provide specific health benefits. There is much new knowledge about the health-promoting properties of some foods and food components.**

### More than Adequate

The *Wise Choices Food Pyramid* follows scientific recommendations to eat “nutrient dense” foods. They can provide additional benefits to help prevent important chronic diseases.

***Nutrient density* is the amount of healthy nutrients in a food, compared to its calorie count. For example, a slice of whole grain bread and a small cupcake may have the same number of calories. However, calorie-for-calorie, the bread provides more nutrients. It is more nutrient dense and is a wiser choice.**

## **We ranked foods on the *Wise Choices Food Pyramid* based on evidence from\*:**

USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans<sup>2</sup>, American Heart Association<sup>3</sup>, American Cancer Society<sup>3</sup>, American Dietetic Association<sup>3,5</sup>, American Academy of Pediatrics<sup>3</sup>, Division of Nutrition Research Coordination of the National Institutes of Health<sup>3</sup>, American Society for Clinical Nutrition<sup>3</sup>, and International Food Information Council Foundation<sup>4</sup>

\*Does not imply endorsement of the *Wise Choices Food Pyramid*.

*MyPyramid*, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and the *Wise Choices Food Pyramid* recommendations are for the general public over 2 years of age. The *Wise Choices Food Pyramid* is not a therapeutic diet. Individuals with a chronic health condition should consult their health care provider to develop an appropriate individual diet. The *Wise Choices Pyramid* reflects current knowledge about the foods depicted. A particular food's exact location on the *Wise Choices Food Pyramid* continuum is not fixed and could change as evidence evolves.

## **Messages in the *Wise Choices Food Pyramid***

**Grains:** Choose **whole grains**, which are located on the left side of the Pyramid, for their disease-fighting phytochemicals, antioxidants, B vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

**Fruits and Vegetables:** Fill up on a colorful variety of fresh, frozen, canned and/or dried **fruits and vegetables**. ANY one of the fruits or vegetables on the *Wise Choices Food Pyramid* is a good choice, but those toward the left side are even better options.

**Protein:** Get more fiber, fewer calories, and less saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet by choosing more beans, lentils, soy products, fish, nuts, and seeds. Avoid salty, processed meats, such as hot dogs, bacon, and cold cuts.

**Dairy:** Cut calories and add calcium with non-fat or reduced-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.

**Extras:** Choose the “extras” that add extra flavor and interest to your diet without adding extra sugar, fat and calories. The group of Extras on the left side shows healthier alternatives to the foods in the group on the right. For example, choose 100% juice instead of soda pop, or choose pretzels in place of potato chips.

**Portions:** Eating moderately by choosing proper portion sizes is still important. Eating from the left side of the *Wise Choices Food Pyramid* is not a license to eat too much!

# WISE CHOICES PYRAMID

## Extras

Substitute foods from the group on the left for the ones on the right side.



## Dairy

Lowfat dairy is an excellent food for weight control



## Protein

Choose more vegetable sources of protein, reduce processed foods



## Vegetables & Fruit

Eat lots of fruits and vegetables of ANY type



## Grains

Choose whole grains whenever you can



## References

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3. Deckelbaum, R., Fisher, E., Winston, M., Kumanyika, S., Lauer, R., Pi-Sunyer, F., St. Jeor, S., Schaefer, E., & Weinstein, I. (1999). Summary of a scientific conference on preventive nutrition: Pediatrics to geriatrics. *Circulation*, 100:450-456.
4. International Food Information Council Foundation. *Background on Functional Foods*. Accessed March 1, 2006 at: <http://www.ific.org/nutrition/functional/index.cfm>
5. American Dietetic Association. (2004). Position of the American Dietetic Association: Functional foods. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 104:814-826.

### For more information, contact:

#### **Kathleen Humphries, PhD**

Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities  
The University of Montana Rural Institute: A Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities  
Education, Research and Services, 52 Corbin Hall, Missoula, MT 59812-7056  
888-268-2743 toll-free; 406-243-5467 V; 406-243-4200 TTY; 406-243-2349 (fax)  
ruralinstitute@umt.edu <http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu>

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**The Wise Choices Pyramid (18"x24") poster can be ordered through The University of Montana Bookstore at <http://www.montanabookstore.com/link/12803705.asp>**

