

## Food Pyramid Questions and Answers



### Why is the Department of Health publishing a new Food Pyramid?

The Department of Health keeps dietary recommendations under review as part of its role in maintaining the evidence base and promoting evidence based public health. In the light of international evidence, recent national Healthy Ireland lifestyle surveys including diet, the FSAI Scientific Recommendations for Healthy Eating Guidelines and a Health Research Board review of Food Pyramid, it was decided to revise the Food Pyramid and Healthy Eating Guidelines.

The development of Healthy Eating Guidelines for the general population is also called for by the *Obesity Policy and Action Plan- A Healthy Weight for Ireland (2016-2025)*.

### We had a Food Pyramid already, what has changed?

Although there are many similarities between the existing pyramid and the new pyramid, however there are also some distinct differences:

#### Separating the Top Shelf from the lower shelves

The separation of the Top Shelf of the pyramid from the lower shelves is to make clear that foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt are not needed for good health. These foods should not be eaten every day but limited to a maximum of once or twice a week. 6 in 10 Irish people eat up to 6 of these every day, and 4 in 10 eat more than 6 servings

#### Moving the Vegetables, Salad and Fruit Shelf to the base of the Food Pyramid

There is an increase in the number of servings of fruits and vegetables from 5 a day up to 7 a day. This means that the Vegetables, Salad and Fruit Shelf is the largest and moves to the bottom of the pyramid. These foods should be the basis of all meals and snacks.

#### Moving the Wholemeal Cereals and Breads, Potatoes, Pasta and Rice Shelf up

The Wholemeal Cereals and Breads, Potatoes, Pasta and Rice Shelf moves up from the bottom to be the second shelf because the Vegetables, Salad and Fruit Shelf is now the bottom shelf.

#### Increasing the serving size for the Wholemeal Cereals and Breads, Potatoes, Pasta and Rice Shelf

The serving size from this shelf increases to approximately 150 calories per serving e.g. two thin slices of regular pan bread is about 150 calories. This is based on an FSAI survey of what constitutes a serving from this shelf.

#### Changing the range of servings from the Wholemeal Cereals and Breads, Potatoes, Pasta and Rice Shelf

The range of servings for this shelf reduces to 3 to 5 servings/day for the population except for teenage boys and men aged 19-50 who may need up to 7 portions from this shelf. The reduction in the number of servings from this shelf is due to the increased serving size. The range of servings for teenage boys and men aged 19-50 depends on their activity levels.

#### Addition of average daily calorie need

The average calorie needs depends on age, size, if you are a man or a woman and on your activity levels. As a reference, adult females need between 1800 and 2000 kcal and adult males between 2000 and 2500 kcals, depending on their levels of activity.

### Addition of serving size guide illustrations

An illustration of various serving guides has been added to the Pyramid. These include:





- Disposable plastic cup to measure cereals, cooked rice and pasta
- Two thumbs as a guide when serving cheese
- The palm of the hand as a guide to serve meat, poultry and fish
- Portion packs to measure reduced-fat spread
- A 5mls teaspoons to guide your portion of peanut butter, jam, marmalade or honey

### What are the key consumer messages?

1. Limit high-fat, sugar, salt foods (HFSS) and drinks from the Top Shelf of the Food Pyramid
2. Eat more Vegetables, Salad and Fruit - up to 7 servings a day
3. Size matters- use the Food Pyramid as a guide for serving sizes

### Why is there such a range of portions for the Wholemeal Cereals and Breads, Potatoes, Pasta and Rice Shelf?

Guidance on the number of servings you need from this Shelf depends on your activity, if you are a man or a woman and on your age. The tables below have been included in the revised Food Pyramid.

Active	Child	Teenager	Adult (19–50)	Adult (51+)	Inactive	Teenager	Adult (19–50)	Adult (51+)
	3–4	4	4–5	3–4		3	3–4	3
	3–5	5–7	5–7	4–5		4–5	4–6	4

### What is “The Food Pyramid”?

It is a visual representation of how different foods and drinks can contribute towards a healthy balanced diet. The Food Pyramid allows individuals the flexibility to choose foods and drinks from each shelf depending on their food preferences. It organises foods and drinks into 5 main shelves, starting from the bottom:

#### 1. Vegetables, Salad and Fruit (5 to 7 portions a day)

**Base your meals** on these and enjoy a variety of colours. **More is better.** Limit fruit juice to unsweetened, once a day.

#### 2. Wholemeal Cereals and Breads, Potatoes, Pasta and Rice (3–5)\* Up to 7 for teenage boys and men age 19–50

**Wholemeal and wholegrain cereals** are best. Enjoy at each meal.

#### 3. Milk, Yogurt and Cheese (3) 5 from the age of 9 to 18

**Choose reduced-fat or low-fat varieties.** Choose low fat milk and yogurt more often than cheese. Enjoy cheese in small amounts. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding need 3 servings a day.

#### 4. Meat, Poultry, Fish, Eggs, Beans and Nuts (2)

Choose **lean** meat, poultry (without skin) and fish. **Eat oily fish up to twice a week.** Choose eggs, beans and nuts. Limit processed salty meats such as sausages, bacon and ham.

#### 5. Fats, Spreads and Oils (In very small amounts)

**Use as little as possible.** Choose mono or polyunsaturated reduced fat or light spreads. Choose rapeseed, olive, canola, sunflower or corn oils. Limit mayonnaise, coleslaw and salad dressings as they also contain oil. Always cook with as little fat or oil as possible – grilling, oven-baking, steaming, boiling or stir-frying.

### You mentioned 5 main shelves, what about the 6<sup>th</sup> shelf?

The Top Shelf includes foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt. These are not needed for good health and should not be consumed every day. Very small amounts once or twice a week maximum is sufficient. The revised Food Pyramid **separates** the Top Shelf from the rest of the pyramid.

### Is the Food Pyramid a guide for everyone?

The Food Pyramid provides guidance for adults, teenagers and children aged five and over.

## What resources are available for consumers and how can these help to interpret the Healthy Eating Guidelines and the Food Pyramid?

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The revised Food Pyramid is supported by a large range of other materials to help convey the key messages to health professionals and consumers:

- Food Pyramid poster for health professionals and educators - these include details of serving sizes
- Food Pyramid for consumers
- Information leaflet
- Six fact sheets – one for each shelf of the Food Pyramid
- Seven daily menus with examples for different target age and lifestyle people
- Serving sizes, alcohol, and physical activity infographics.

## If it is a Food Pyramid, why does it include notes about water and physical activity?

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Food is very important but not the only element to a healthy lifestyle.

To maintain a healthy weight, adults need at least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on 5 days a week (or 150 minutes a week); children need to be active at a moderate to vigorous level for at least 60 minutes every day.

You need to keep hydrated, drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day – water is best.

## Why are we still using a pyramid when other countries use different food guide models?

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In 2014, the Department of Health commissioned the Health Research Board to carry out a review of international healthy eating guidelines. The Department of Health's dietary recommendations are similar to the dietary recommendations of other countries (Australia, Canada and the USA), which have populations with similar characteristics (specifically, age-sex-activity levels).

In 2015 the Department commissioned IPSOS MRBI to look at the general public and health professional's views of the use of a pyramid to translate our dietary messages into an easily understood graphical tool. The conclusion from this work was that the pyramid was a **popular and user friendly** in the Irish context. Other countries use other tools, like rainbows, or plates but essentially all these countries are giving the same general advice, just using different tools to communicate them.

No tool is perfect, because there are lots of messages to impart. Essentially, what we need, and plan is to **develop is a range of educational tools** based on this pyramid to meet the needs of different groups in our population.

## Why is there up to 7 servings from the Wholemeal Cereals and Breads, Potatoes, Pasta and Rice Shelf?

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Firstly, the average serving is 3-5 servings and the recommendation is to choose a VARIETY of the food choices on this shelf. So it's not just bread, it's breakfast cereals, potatoes, rice and pasta.

Fourteen slices of bread does seem like a lot. But remember these recommendations are for the whole population and since the food pyramid **recommends eating very little "Top Shelf foods"** a young active man would need to eat 7 portions from the starchy foods shelf to meet his energy needs.

If you think about what a typical active male in Ireland the 1970s would have eaten – when Top Shelf foods weren't as easily available - his diet would have included lots of starchy foods to give him the energy he needed to be active. He wouldn't have been overweight.

Of course if you eat a lot of Top Shelf foods like biscuits, bars, soft drinks, then you will put on weight if you also consume 7 portions from the starchy food shelf – but that's not what is recommended in the Food Pyramid. For example 2 slices of bread is about the same calories/energy as 3 biscuits, or a small bar of chocolate, or a 500ml soft drink.

## Have we not moved on from the old fashioned advice about saturated fat?

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Yes, there has been some research published in the last couple of years to counter the traditional dietary advice and these studies have received a lot of attention in the media. While they have received a lot of media attention there is not enough evidence for consensus to change dietary advice.

Dietary guidelines around the world still advise populations to limit the frequency and serving size of red meat, to avoid processed meats and fatty dairy produce like butter and cream. They also recommend we avoid high sugar intake, particularly from liquid sources.

This can be difficult for consumers because we sometimes get conflicting nutrition messages almost daily from a huge range of sources. Consumers say they don't know who to trust and they believe the advice from experts "keeps changing". In reality the advice from experts has not changed dramatically over the last 2 decades.

## Do you think people will take any notice of this?

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Consumers clearly identified the Food Pyramid as a credible and well known source of dietary guidance during the research undertaken as part of the development of the new Food Pyramid.

## How much has all this work cost?

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This work involved a number of different elements including the review of the existing pyramid, focus groups with consumers and with teachers and healthcare professionals, design and printing costs for the new materials. The cost of this work is of considerable benefit when compared with the costs of overweight and obesity and related health conditions.

## How have you tested this Food Pyramid to ensure people understand it?

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Focus groups were held with consumers, teachers and healthcare professionals to ensure that the messages are clear and delivered in a way that is accessible to all users.

## Why have you increased fruit & veg intake to 7 servings when three quarters of the population are not eating the basic 5 servings?

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The guidance in the new Food Pyramid is to eat 5 to 7 portions of fruit and vegetable servings per day. The previous pyramid recommended 5 or more portions a day. This change in presentation is to show that fruit and vegetables should represent the largest proportion of your meals.

## Why are high-fat, sugar and salt foods still included if they are not needed for a healthy balanced healthy?

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It is clearly communicated in the revised Food Pyramid that these foods are not need for good health. The revised food pyramid **separates** the top shelf from the rest of the pyramid to illustrate this. This shelf is included in the pyramid so that the guidance is realistic and acceptable to consumers.

### Source

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