

FAX

COVER SHEET

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(Including cover): _____

FROM: Julie

SUBJECT: _____

COMMENTS:

Hope this helps!

Background

The Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children

To help improve the diets of young children two to six years old, USDA has developed the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children*. This "new" Pyramid is an adaptation of the original *Food Guide Pyramid*, released in 1992, to simplify the educational messages and focus on young children's food preferences and nutritional requirements.

Young children have unique food patterns and needs in comparison to older children and adults. Also, many young children are not eating healthful diets, and nutritionists know that early food experiences are crucial to food preferences and patterns throughout life.

Changes Made

The graphic and messages in the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* have been made easier to understand and more appropriate for this audience of two- to six-year-old children, their parents, and their caregivers. The graphic shows foods that are commonly eaten by young children, drawn in a realistic style, and shown in single serving sizes when possible. The food group names have been shortened to simplify them, and the number of servings recommended is a single number rather than a range.

The key message in the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* is that eating a variety of foods is healthful. The Pyramid is surrounded with illustrations of children engaged in active pursuits, to show the importance of physical activity.

Development

The *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* is based on actual food patterns of young children. The Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, part of USDA's Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, analyzed the diets of young children and adapted existing food guidance recommendations to meet their specific needs. The development of the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* and supporting educational material was a direct result of this research.

Center staff examined food choices and typical portion sizes reported for young children in national food consumption surveys. They determined that the nutrients in these foods, if eaten in amounts recommended by the original *Food Guide Pyramid*, would meet children's nutritional needs. Since *Pyramid* food groups and numbers of servings resulted in a nutritionally adequate diet for young children, the *Pyramid* was used as the basis for a new graphic. The actual foods depicted in the new graphic were selected from foods eaten most often by children, and, in several cases, foods that children need to eat more often.

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The "Tips for Using the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children 2 to 6 Years Old" booklet is based on the needs for food and nutrition information identified by parents and caregivers of young children. Educational messages and prototype materials for the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* were tested with parents and caregivers in two rounds of focus groups. These groups were held in several different geographic regions of the United States. The information that was gathered from focus group participants helped to determine the messages included in the materials and also the types of materials developed.

What is included in the booklet?

The booklet "Tips for Using the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children 2 to 6 Years Old" contains a wealth of information and advice for parents and care givers, including:

- * Tips for encouraging healthful eating
- * Basic information about the Food Guide Pyramid
- * "Child-size" serving information
- * List of foods in each group to encourage young children to eat a variety of different foods
- * Suggested kitchen activities for parents to do with their young children
- * Snack ideas
- * Meal planning ideas
- * Chart to track foods eaten over several days
- * "Hands-on" food activity for home or child care centers

What do children eat?

The foods that 2- to 6-year-old children eat most often are somewhat different from foods eaten by older children and adults. For example, more of their meat group servings come from ground beef and luncheon meats, and less from fish. Young children are more likely than adults to eat ready-to-eat cereals. Also, in comparison to older children and adults, young children are less likely to eat lettuce salads and more likely to eat cooked green beans. They are also more likely to drink fruit juice than to eat whole fruit.

Overall, most young children are not consuming the recommended number of servings from the vegetable, fruit, grain, and meat groups. For example, 2- to 6-year-old children eat only about 1 ½ servings per day of vegetables, in comparison to the recommendation that they eat 3 servings a day. Older children and adults also fail to eat the recommended number of servings of vegetables, eating only about 2 1/2 of their recommended 3 to 5 servings per day.

Where to find Materials

The graphic and booklet may be downloaded from the home page of the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion on the World Wide Web. The URL for the home page is <http://www.usda.gov/cnpp>. Copies may also be ordered from the Government Printing Office.

Questions and Answers

The Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children

Why did USDA develop a Pyramid for young children?

The *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* was developed to help improve the diets of young children two to six years old. An adaptation of the original *Food Guide Pyramid* was needed because young children have unique food patterns and needs, and many young children are not eating healthful diets. In addition, early food experiences are crucial to food preferences and patterns throughout life. USDA receives numerous requests for information about feeding young children and how to use the *Food Guide Pyramid* with young children, particularly with respect to serving sizes.

How is the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children different from the original Food Guide Pyramid?

The *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* is different in several respects from the original, to make the graphic and messages easier to understand for this audience and their parents and caregivers. First, the *Pyramid* has been simplified by shortening food group names and using single numbers rather than ranges for numbers of servings.

Second, the *Pyramid* graphic was designed to be more understandable and appealing to young children. Realistic food items, in single serving portions when possible, were used in the graphic. The abstract "sprinkles" that symbolized fat and added sugars in the original *Pyramid* were eliminated, and in the tip of the *Pyramid* these symbols were replaced with drawings of food items.

Third, the educational message that physical activity is important is stressed by showing young children engaged in active pursuits surrounding the *Pyramid*.

Is USDA changing its advice about what kids should eat?

No. The new illustration and materials were designed to be more appealing and appropriate for young children, but the nutritional advice has not changed. The decision not to change the nutritional advice was based on research about what children eat and their nutritional needs.

Nutritionists at USDA identified what foods young children actually eat, from a nationwide food consumption survey. They compared these food choices, if eaten in amounts recommended by the *Food Guide Pyramid*, to children's nutrient needs. This research showed that young children's nutritional needs could be met by eating combinations of the foods they normally eat, in *Pyramid* recommended amounts. Therefore, the recommendations in the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* were based on the original *Pyramid*. The food groups are the same as those in the original, and the numbers of servings recommended for young children fall at the lower end of the recommended ranges.

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What are the main nutrition messages illustrated by the new graphic?

The main focus of the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* is on eating a variety of foods. Eating foods from each of the major Pyramid food groups everyday is the best way for children to grow well and be healthy. Children would also benefit from getting more variety within certain food groups, choosing more whole grains and dark green vegetables, for example.

While focusing on the importance of variety, the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* de-emphasizes fat restriction, recognizing that some fats are necessary for early growth and development. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans suggest that fat in preschoolers' diets be gradually reduced from their current levels (34% of total calories) to the level recommended for most people (no more than 30% of total calories) by about 5 years of age.

How do children's actual diets compare to the recommendations made in the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children*?

Young children are not eating the recommended numbers of servings from most of the five major food groups. The recommendations from the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* are compared to the actual amounts eaten by young children and by all individuals age 2 and over in the chart below. The actual intakes are from a USDA nationwide survey of food consumption.

What foods in the graphic are there because children eat them often, and what foods are there because children need to eat more of them?

Most of the foods in the graphic are those foods commonly eaten by young children. For example, fruit juices are more popular with young children than whole fruits. Potatoes and tomatoes are the most frequently eaten vegetables. Some cooked vegetables, such as green beans, are eaten more often than salad greens by young children. Breads, ready-to-eat cereals, pasta, and tortillas are all common grain choices of young children.

Dark-green leafy vegetables such as spinach are not eaten frequently by young children, but were included in the illustration to encourage children to eat them more often. Of dark-green vegetables, broccoli is eaten most often by this age group. Baked potato is not the most commonly served form of potato but was illustrated to encourage serving children lower fat versions of this popular vegetable. Whole-grain products also were shown to encourage eating them more often.

Does USDA expect that children two to six years old will understand the messages in the *Pyramid* graphic?

The *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* graphic was not designed to be a stand-alone piece. It is an educational tool to be used by parents and caregivers with their children. The design incorporates features that parents, during focus group testing, said would make it "child-friendly" and easier to use in teaching their children. However they recognized that they would need to

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help their children understand the meaning of the *Pyramid*. The *Pyramid* provides a framework for fun and interactive family learning and an opportunity for parents to model healthful food choices. The accompanying booklet provides parents and caretakers with tips to help them select foods for their children, ways to model healthful behaviors, and activities to teach children about the *Pyramid*, nutrition, and health.

Is the original *Pyramid* still appropriate for educational efforts targeted to 2- to 6-year olds?

The original *Pyramid* illustrates the food guide developed for the general population, with ranges of servings from each food group suggested to meet the nutritional and calorie needs of people of diverse ages, sizes, and activity levels. Either *Pyramid* could be used in educational efforts for groups that include parents of young children, depending on the specific objectives of the education. Both illustrate the same concepts, but the adapted graphic is more visually appealing to young children.

What impact will the Year 2000 *Dietary Guidelines* have on the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children*? Why release the children's pyramid now?

The food groupings and recommended number of servings in each group depicted on the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* graphic are based on meeting nutrient requirements (RDAs) using foods patterns commonly consumed by young children. These factors will not be changed by revisions in the *Dietary Guidelines*.

USDA has had many requests for the type of information contained in the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* and, therefore, we believe the public is best served by releasing it now. USDA has used the best available science in developing the adapted *Pyramid*, and there is sufficient scientific evidence to go forward with its release at this time.

How can someone get copies of the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children*?

The graphic and booklet may be downloaded from the home page of the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion on the World Wide Web. The URL for the home page is <http://www.usda.gov/cnpp>. Copies may also be ordered from the Government Printing Office.

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