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Food Guide Pyramid: Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs & Nut Group

by Harriet Kohn, Extension Nutrition Specialist

The United States Department of Agriculture's Food Guide Pyramid is a food guide for individuals over the age of two. This general nutrition guide encourages Americans to eat a variety of foods from each of the five basic food groups. Foods in each group provide important nutrients, and individuals need to eat foods from each group daily in order to get the necessary amounts of these nutrients.

This fact sheet provides a closer look at the Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs and Nut group. The Pyramid recommends two to three servings each day from this group for a total of 5 to 7 ounces.

Foods in this group provide protein, niacin, vitamins B6 and B12, iron, phosphorous and zinc. Meat, poultry, fish and egg yolk also provide fat and cholesterol. All of the foods provide calories. The nutrient content varies among the individual foods in this group. It is important to eat a variety of them to get a balanced assortment of nutrients.

Alternate to Meats

Eggs — use occasionally as a substitute for meat. The American Heart Association suggests limiting the intake of egg yolks to 4 a week because they are high in cholesterol.

Dry Beans, peas, nuts and seeds — can be used in place of meat. The vitamin and mineral content of these foods is much like meat but does not contain vitamin B12. Beans and peas contain carbohydrates and are lower in fat than lean meat. Nuts and seeds are higher in fat than lean meat.

Iron

Meat, poultry and fish are the best sources of iron present in a form the body can absorb. The iron in dry beans and peas, however, is in a form not well absorbed. The iron in plant foods is better absorbed when eaten with a source of vitamin C like citrus fruits or broccoli. Also eating some meat, poultry, or fish along with the plant foods help the body absorb iron.

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is only present in animal foods. Egg yolk and organ meats are especially high in cholesterol and should be limited.

Fats

Current recommendations are to limit fat to 30% or less of calories. Foods can be selected and prepared from this group to keep fat low — especially the saturated fats that tend to contribute to the development of heart disease. Choose lean meat, trim visible fat from meat, remove the skin from chicken. Instead of frying, bake or broil. Serve fat-free sauces and gravies.

The following chart gives examples of the amount of meat alternate to use in place of 1 ounce of lean meat, poultry or fish.

MEAT OR MEAT ALTERNATE

	Total fat (Grams)	Saturated fatty acids (Grams)	Cholesterol (Milligrams)	Calories
Cooked beef eye of round roast, lean, 1 ounce	1	1	20	50
Cooked pork center loin, lean, 1 ounce	3	1	22	60
Cooked chicken breast meat, 1 ounce	1	trace	24	45
Cooked halibut, 1 ounce	trace	trace	16	32
Cooked egg, 1 large	5	2	213	75
Cooked dry beans, 1/2 cup	trace	trace	0	110
Tofu, 1/2 cup	4	1	0	70
Peanut Butter, 2 tablespoons	16	3	0	190
Seeds, roasted, 1/4 cup	19	2	0	210
Nuts, 1/3 cup	23	4	0	265

References:

USDA, Human Nutrition Information Service. The Food Guide Pyramid. Home and Garden Bulletin No. 252, Washington, DC., August 1992

USDA, Human Nutrition Information Service, Home and Garden Bulletin No. 252-2, July 1993

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