

MyPyramid: Meat and Beans Group

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MyPyramid – the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) food guide system – is an interactive, online guide that provides individuals with recommended food amounts based on sex, age and activity level. Look for this personalized guide at www.MyPyramid.gov. For healthful diets, stay within your calorie limit while getting needed nutrients from each of the basic food groups. Learn to balance food intake and physical activity to maintain a healthy weight.



This fact sheet provides a look at the **Meat and Beans Group** from MyPyramid. All meats, beans, eggs and nuts or seeds are part of this food group. For a 2,000 calorie diet MyPyramid recommends 5 1/2 ounces from this food group each day. More or fewer ounces may be needed depending on individual calorie needs. Go to www.MyPyramid.gov to find the daily calories and ounces from the Meat and Beans Group that are right for you.

One ounce of meat, poultry or fish, 1/4 cup cooked dry beans, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter or 1/2 ounce of nuts or seeds are considered to be equal to one ounce from the Meat and Beans Group.

Why Include Meat and Beans?

Meats and beans provide several nutrients that are needed to build and maintain the body. These nutrients include protein, B vitamins, iron, vitamin E, magnesium and zinc. Proteins build and maintain body tissues like bones, muscles, skin and blood. B vitamins have many jobs within the body. They help the body use energy and build tissues. They play an important role in the nervous system and in forming red blood cells. Iron carries oxygen in the blood. Vitamin E is an antioxidant that protects our cells from breaking down. Magnesium is important for bone health and in releasing energy for our muscles to use. Zinc helps our immune system.

Making Healthy Choices

The nutrient content varies among the individual foods in the Meat and Beans Group. Some meats are high in saturated

fats and can raise LDL cholesterol levels in the blood which is a risk factor for heart disease. Fatty cuts of meat and processed meats are among meats high in saturated fat. Many processed meats also have unhealthy levels of sodium. Replace high fat meat choices with lower sodium and leaner choices such as:

- Lean beef cuts including round steak and roasts, top loin, top sirloin, and chuck shoulder and arm roasts
- Lean pork cuts including pork loin, tenderloin, center loin and ham
- Extra lean ground beef with a label of 90 percent (or higher) lean
- Skinless chicken (buy it skinless or take skin off)
- Lean turkey, roast beef, ham or low-fat luncheon meats

Vary Protein Choices

Most Americans get enough foods from the Meat and Beans Group but could make leaner and healthier choices through variety. Choosing fish more often is one option. Eating fish twice a week (six to eight ounces total) may reduce the risk of death from coronary artery disease. Eat fish that is rich in omega-3 fatty acids such as herring, salmon and trout and prepare fish without adding any fat.

Choose dry beans or peas as a main dish or add them to other dishes in your meals. Some ideas for adding dry beans and peas include chili with pinto or kidney beans; split pea, lentil, minestrone or white bean soup; baked beans and black bean burritos.

Nuts and seeds also are good choices as a snack, on salads or in main dishes. Sunflower seeds, almonds and hazelnuts are rich sources of vitamin E, and walnuts and flax are excellent sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

Keep It Lean While Cooking

When cooking, keep meat and bean choices lean. Try some of the following tips to trim the fat.

- Trim away all the visible fat from meats and poultry before cooking.
- Grill, broil, roast or boil meat instead of frying it.
- Drain off any fat that appears during cooking.
- Skip or limit breading on meats, poultry and fish – it only adds fat and calories.

- Prepare dry beans and peas without added fats.
- Choose and prepare foods without high-fat sauces or gravies.

Keep It Safe

- Take care when storing and preparing meats, poultry, fish and eggs at home to reduce risk of food-borne illness. Keep the work area clean and make sure to maintain proper temperatures when storing and cooking meats, poultry, fish and eggs.
- Wash cutting boards, knives, utensils and counter tops with hot soapy water after working with each of these foods and before going on to other foods.
- Store raw meat, poultry and seafood on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator so their juices do not drop onto other foods.

- Cook raw meat, poultry and eggs to a safe internal temperature (above 140 degrees) and keep them cool (below 40 degrees) or frozen (under 0 degrees) when storing. Do not leave these foods at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Avoid raw or partially cooked eggs, meat, poultry or foods containing raw eggs.
- Do not thaw foods at room temperature. Instead, place them in the refrigerator, put them in airtight containers in cold water or thaw them on a plate in the microwave.

References

United States Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005*. 6th edition, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 2005.