

USDA dietary guidelines get personal

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - The US Department of Agriculture today presented its new guidelines that for the first time advise consumers to personalize their diet and exercise, geared to their specific calorie needs and levels of physical activity.

Replacing the former "food pyramid," the new symbol is a triangle divided by six different colored bands representing different food groups and has a set of steps beside it with a stick figure walking up them to emphasize exercise.

Food proportions are shown by the different widths of the bands with grains (orange) the largest, followed by dairy (blue), vegetables (green), fruits (red), meat and beans (purple), and fats, sugars and salt (yellow). The new information provides in-depth information for each food group, replacing the conventional "number of servings" with commonly used measures, like cups and ounces.

With advice tips such as "make half your grains whole," "vary your veggies," and "go lean with protein," the new food guidance system can be found online at mypyramid.gov.

The USDA's internet program is interactive, allowing consumers to plug in their age, sex and physical activity level to find out what and how much an individual should eat for health based on the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

The Web site includes a "tracker," comparing a day's worth of foods eaten with current nutrition guidance. Information is tailored to an individual's desire to maintain their current weight or to lose weight.

The new program also includes print materials that translate the guidelines into a total diet that meets nutrient needs from food sources and aims to moderate or limit dietary components often consumed in excess, according to the portion of the Web site targeted to professionals.