

**THE PYRAMID:
A VALUABLE TOOL FOR PROVIDING
GUIDANCE ON DIETARY PATTERNS, DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS,
PHYSICAL EXERCISE, AND OTHER ASPECTS OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE**

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The Food Guide Pyramid is a powerful and flexible tool for consumer information that can be modified in numerous ways to reflect public policy or to embody the views of groups that disagree with current public policy. This power and flexibility is an asset, not a problem, and the existence of numerous modified versions of the pyramid is a testament to its utility and appropriateness in conveying basic concepts. It would be a shame to consign such a valuable tool to the rubbish heap, and the Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN) urges the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP) to retain it with appropriate additions or modifications. CRN is a leading trade association for the dietary supplement industry, representing manufacturers of vitamins, minerals, and other ingredients used both in dietary supplements and in conventional foods, and also representing many manufacturers of dietary supplement finished products, including many nationally recognized and respected brands.

We congratulate the CNPP for its current efforts to increase consumer motivation and improve consumer understanding of the latest science-based nutrition guidance regarding the “total diet” -- and for seeking to place that guidance in the context of the “total lifestyle.” For about two-thirds of American adults, dietary supplements are an integral part of the total diet and represent just one of the many choices health-conscious people make as part of their overall approach to seeking wellness. Accordingly, dietary supplements should be taken into account in some fashion in the design of a revised pyramid or other graphic approach to diet and lifestyle guidance, along with other elements such as the need for regular physical activity.

While dietary supplements should never replace efforts to consume the healthiest diet possible, they are a scientifically sound, convenient and affordable way to help ensure that Americans reach their nutrient intake goals. In a society where the majority of us are eating too much, too often, there is a potential danger in ignoring the fact that conventional foods, because they inevitably provide calories as well as nutrients, may not always be the optimum mechanism for increasing the intake of specific nutrients recognized to be in short supply. Supplements of calcium, vitamin D, folic acid, and vitamin B-12 are examples of products that may have particular relevance for many population groups, including women of childbearing age, vegetarians, and the elderly. Multivitamins, on the other hand, would be a valuable addition to a healthy diet for virtually all adults and probably also for most teens and younger children.

Alternative pyramids usefully illustrate a number of approaches to incorporating dietary supplements, physical activity, and other aspects of a healthy lifestyle into the pyramid graphic. For example, the “Healthy Eating Pyramid” developed by Harvard

University sits on a base of Daily Exercise and Weight Control, includes calcium supplements within the pyramid itself as an alternative to dairy products, and features sidebars indicating that multivitamins are recommended for most people and that alcohol should be used only in moderation, unless contraindicated altogether. These concepts are conveyed simply and directly in a manner that is no more complex than the interpretation of the basic Food Guide Pyramid.

Scientists at the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University developed a modified pyramid for the elderly that sits on a base of water to emphasize the need for at least 8 glasses of water daily and that also features a supplement “flag” on top as a reminder that supplements of calcium, vitamin D, and vitamin B-12 may be needed to promote optimal health in the elderly. Naturally, CRN likes the idea of a supplement flag on the pyramid, but this is only one of the graphics that could be used effectively to convey the importance of appropriate supplementation and its role as an integral part of the total diet and a healthy lifestyle.

The pyramid is widely recognized as an icon of nutrition guidance. CRN suggests modification of that icon to reflect the updated advice offered by the Dietary Guidelines Committee regarding conventional food intakes and the inclusion of other healthy lifestyle choices that complement and support good diets. In addition, we urge the CNPP to be open-minded in considering appropriate ways to give consumers realistic and practical advice that includes dietary supplements as a rational tool for increasing nutrient intakes when a hectic lifestyle and the search for weight control combine to undermine the pie-in-the-sky ideal of getting all nutrients from conventional foods.