

## **USDA'S FOOD PYRAMID SERVINGS DATABASE**

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The Food Guide Pyramid translates information on nutrient needs into food-based servings recommendations. It is the primary tool used by U.S. nutritionists to describe a healthful diet. However, dietary assessments have generally focused on the adequacy of nutrient rather than food intakes. One reason is that food composition databases have not been available with information on food components defined in terms comparable to food servings.

ARS has developed a Pyramid Servings Database, which makes it possible to compare food intake data to pyramid recommendations. This database was developed using a new method that separates foods into ingredients before servings are counted, adheres to pyramid principles, uses the serving sizes specified by the pyramid, and categorizes foods according to pyramid criteria. It includes data on numbers of servings of 30 food groups per 100 grams for approximately 6,000 foods -- all those reported in USDA's 1994-96 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII). The 30 food groups include the major pyramid food groups (grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, and meat and meat alternates), selected subgroups, and three components from the pyramid tip -- fat, sugars, and alcohol. Data for the grain, vegetable, fruit, and dairy food groups are in servings. Data for the meat and meat alternate food groups are in ounces of cooked lean meat equivalents. Fat from the pyramid tip is in grams, added sugars are in teaspoons, and alcohol is in number of drinks.

The Pyramid Servings Database represents an important dietary assessment advance. Pyramid Intake Data Files for the 1994-96 CSFII have been created using this new database. These files have been used to assess the adequacy of the American diet relative to Food Guide Pyramid recommendations and to monitor progress toward national nutrition objectives.

Data from the CSFII 1994-96 for over 14,000 individuals aged 2 years and over were used to estimate mean numbers of servings from pyramid food groups and percentages of the population meeting pyramid recommendations. In 1994-96, the average American diet had fewer servings from the fruit, dairy, and meat groups than minimum numbers recommended; numbers from the grain and vegetable groups were near the bottom of recommended ranges. Intakes of whole grains, dark-green vegetables, and legumes were notably low. Large proportions of the population (59%-77%) failed to meet food group recommendations, and intakes of fat and added sugars exceeded recommendations.

The Pyramid Servings Database and Pyramid Intake Data Files for CSFII 1994-96 are available on CD-ROM for \$65 from the National Technical Information Service at 5285 Port Royal Road, Springfield, VA 22161 (Phone 703-605-6000). Request NTIS Accession No. PB98-500457.