



Latino food pyramid good guide to health

I've heard about a new diet pyramid specifically for Latinos. Is it very different from the official diet pyramid?

The new pyramid does look different from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "MyPyramid" system, which was introduced in January 2005. The Latin American Diet Pyramid looks more like the USDA's old pyramid, with assorted foods toward the base of the pyramid to choose "at most meals" and choices to select less often near the top. But the goal of both pyramids is the same: To encourage healthful food choices.

The Latino pyramid is so different because it's not part of the official USDA food guide. It was developed by the same group that created the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid in the 1990s. The nonprofit group, Oldways Preservation Trust, is an advocacy group focused on a balance between good nutrition, traditional foods and sustainable environmental practices. Oldways started the Latino Nutrition Coalition, which designed the new pyramid and accompanying materials, available at <http://www.latino-nutrition.org/>. As stated by Oldways, "It is a tradition-based diet that bridges the gaps between the cultural and scientific characteristics of food."

The organization decided to focus on Latino diets for a number of reasons, including the high rates of obesity and diabetes among Latinos in the United States. According to the National Diabetes Information

Clearinghouse, Hispanic Americans are nearly twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to have diabetes, after adjusting for age differences. And, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hispanic Americans are more likely to be obese than non-Hispanic whites.

That's one reason why daily physical activity is stressed in the Latino Diet Pyramid, forming its base. Next up the line are fruits, vegetables, and the category of whole grains, tubers, pasta, beans and nuts: Eat these foods at every meal. Next comes foods to eat daily: fish and shellfish, plant oils and dairy products, and poultry. Finally, meats, sweets and eggs form the tip of the pyramid, to be enjoyed weekly.

You get a taste of the Latino flavor of the pyramid in the specific foods it includes. For example, the vegetable category includes cactus, tomatillos and chiles. The fruit category includes cherimoya, guava and tamarind. The grain category includes taro, arepas, malanga, cassava and plantains. These kinds of foods, often popular in Latino kitchens, are rarely mentioned in the MyPyramid system.

Still, MyPyramid does offer a Spanish-language version at its Web site, <http://mypyramid.gov>. Using information from both systems could be the ticket to health for the nation's fastest-growing population group.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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