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**Food guidelines ? How much is a serving?** [1]

Alice,

Is there a chart that lists how much of various foods constitute a "serving" under the new food guidelines?

? Trying to eat healthy

**Answer**

Dear Trying to Eat Healthy,

Figuring out what and how much to eat can feel overwhelming, but thankfully there are a number of resources available to help you inform a balanced diet. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) review and update the national dietary guidelines every five years, incorporating the latest research related to nutrition. While the guidelines do outline recommended daily intakes associated with each food group, the new recommendation regarding a healthy and nutritious diet focuses more on establishing healthy eating patterns (more on that later).

When it comes to serving sizes, there's no single chart that details how much of a particular food constitutes a serving. However, you can click on each food group's heading (see below) for more information on common portion sizes. Note that these amounts are based on a 2000-calorie diet for adult males and females, so you may find that you need to adjust it based on your body, lifestyle, or energy needs.

**Grains** [2]
Grains are measured in one-ounce equivalents. For females, eating five to six ounces of grains per day is advised, whereas six to eight ounces per day is advised for males. The guidelines also suggest making half of your daily grains whole grain.

Examples of one-ounce equivalents:

- One regular slice of bread
- Half cup cooked pasta
- One cup ready-to-eat breakfast cereal

**Vegetables** [3]
Unlike grains, vegetables are measured in cups. In some cases, there may be different one-
cup equivalents for raw versus cooked vegetables. It’s recommended that females consume two to two and a half cups of vegetables, while males consume two and a half to three cups of vegetables.

Examples of one-cup equivalents:

- Two cups raw spinach
- One cup, chopped, raw red peppers
- One large baked sweet potato

**Fruits** [4]
Similar to vegetables, fruits are also measured in one-cup equivalents. It’s also interesting to note that fruit juices (specifically 100 percent fruit juice) count towards your daily amounts! Females are directed to consume one and a half to two cups of fruit, while males are directed to consume two cups of fruit daily.

Examples of one-cup equivalents:

- Eight large strawberries
- One cup 100 percent fruit juice
- Half cup dried fruit

**Dairy** [5]
Dairy is also measured in one-cup equivalents. Dairy foods are those milk products that retain their calcium content. The guidelines also suggest that you choose fat-free or low-fat options in the dairy food group. It’s recommended that both male and female adults consume three cups of dairy each day.

Examples of one-cup equivalents:

- Two cups cottage cheese
- One cup of calcium-fortified soy milk
- One third cup shredded cheese

**Protein** [6]
Similar to grains, protein foods are also measured in one-ounce equivalents. Proteins can include meats as well as non-meats such as nuts, soy, and beans. It’s advised that females eat five to five and a half ounces of protein, while males consume five and half to six and a half ounces of protein each day.

Examples of one-ounce equivalents:

- One egg
- One sandwich slice of turkey
- One quarter cup of cooked beans

**Oils** [7]
Oils are defined as fats that remain in liquid form at room temperature. There may be oils in foods you already eat, which means you may not need to incorporate additional oil into your diet. For example, half of a medium avocado or two tablespoons of peanut butter provide three and four teaspoons of oil respectively, while also counting towards your vegetable or nuts allowance. The guidelines suggest that females consume five to six teaspoons of oil per
day, while males consume six to seven teaspoons.

Examples of one-teaspoon equivalents:

- One tablespoon mayonnaise
- One tablespoon Italian dressing
- One-sixth of an avocado

It might also help to keep in mind that some portion sizes can be misleading, especially when dining out. Additionally, in the United States, pre-packaged food portions are often oversized and contain several servings of the recommended categories so be sure to check the nutrition information labels when possible.

It’s good to note that these nutrition guidelines have evolved over time due to increased scientific knowledge and, as such, a few additional nutritional notions were added to the latest edition. Researchers have discovered that how people eat over the course of their lifetime is actually more predictive of their health status than whether an individual consumes a particular food or nutrient. Beyond recommended servings for each food group, you’ll find some key recommendations for establishing a healthy eating pattern in the new guidelines, including:

- Include a variety of vegetables, whole fruits, grains (of which half are whole grains), fat-free or low-fat dairy, a variety of protein foods, and oils.
- Limit foods like saturated and trans fats, added sugars, and sodium.
- If consuming alcohol, drink in moderation.

What else is new with the updated guidelines? Because health outcomes are not determined by dietary intake alone, the guidelines have also emphasized a habit of regular physical activity as a beneficial healthy behavior.

If you’re hungry for more information on dietary recommendations, consider talking to your health care provider or making an appointment with a registered dietician. Either can advise you on tailoring these dietary recommendations to your preferences and lifestyle. You can also check out ChooseMyPlate.gov and the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics? Food and Nutrition Information website for even more information.

Alice!

Category:
Nutrition & Physical Activity
Optimal Nutrition
Healthy Eating

Related questions

- Meal planning for people with diabetes
- Solid versus liquid calories? Which is better?
- Is juice as good as whole fruit?

Resources

Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside)
Medical Services (Morningside)
[22] https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cumc