



THE SKINNY ON FAT

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* emphasize overall dietary modifications for individuals older than two years to reduce the risk of diet-related chronic diseases. However, concerns have been raised regarding whether young children can consume sufficient calories and nutrients for growth if total calories from fat are limited to 30 percent.

The American Heart Association states that a gradual transition to a heart-healthy diet can begin *after* the age of two as the diet becomes more varied. Some researches recommend this gradual transition after the age of 5.

There's little information that restricting fat before 2 years of age can be beneficial, but there's plenty of evidence that it could be dangerous. The main reason is that restricting fat may retard growth and development.

Fat is a concentrated source of energy (nine calories per gram of food), providing nearly twice as much as carbohydrates and protein. Besides energy, fats are used for energy storage, organ insulation and or transporting the fat-soluble vitamins,

A, D, E and K. Fats also add flavor and texture in foods, giving us a feeling of fullness after eating.

Saturated fats are solid at room temperature and are commonly found in animal products and plant oils, such as coconut and palm oil. Eating high amounts of saturated fat may raise cholesterol blood levels, even in young children. Less than one-third of the total fat consumed should be saturated.

Unsaturated fats are softer or more liquid at room temperature. Plants are the predominant source. Over two-thirds of the total fat consumed should be unsaturated.

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance that is a component of cell membranes. Cholesterol is made by the liver, so if sufficient amounts are not eaten the body makes up the difference. Cholesterol is found naturally in foods of animal origin.

Children are very good at knowing how many calories they need in a day. Let them decide how much to eat, but offer healthy choices. As well, encourage children to participate in physical activities. The following lists will make it easier to make lower-fat choices.

Choose from this list WHEN POSSIBLE

Fish, especially salmon, mackerel & tuna

Fat-free & low-fat dairy products (such as skim milk)

Canola, olive & peanut oil

Fresh fruits & vegetables

Choose from this list IN MODERATION

Skinless chicken, shrimp, sardines & lean meats

Ice milk & milk-based sherbet

Mayonnaise & mayonnaise-based salads

Corn, cottonseed, safflower, sesame, soybean & sunflower oil

Choose SPARINGLY from this list

Bacon, sausage, luncheon meats & hotdogs

Hard cheese, butter & cream

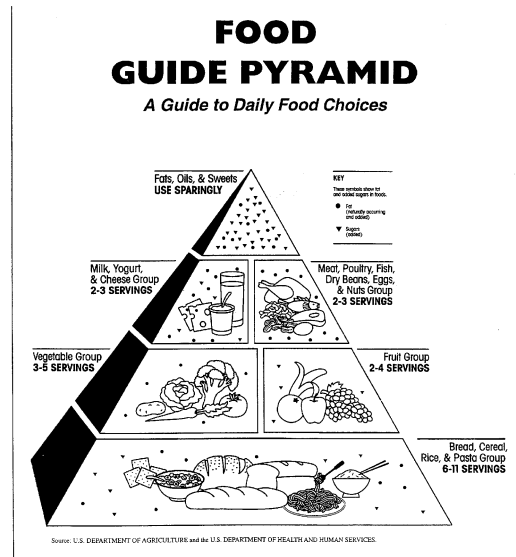
Egg yolks

Croissants

Coconut, palm & palm kernel oil

References

- Complete Food & Nutrition Guide. American Dietetic Association, Roberta Duyff, 1996.
- Sorting Out the Facts About Fat. IFIC Review, 1991.
- Children & Low-Fat Diets. University of Wisconsin-Madison, Nutrition Education Program, 1990.



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