

**Family Living Focus**  
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**What's Up With The Food Guide Pyramid?**

The Food Guide Pyramid for Americans has been receiving a lot of criticism lately. When the pyramid was introduced in 1992, it had already been recalled and retooled. However, it was the first food guide in the United States to address the swelling research linking diet to disease by ranking the food groups.

The "Basic Four" Food Groups Guide had first been introduced in 1958 and although other guides came and went, the simplicity of the Basic Four recommendations made it hard to replace.

While it appears that diet recommendations come and go with the wind, most are based on extensive research with large populations. The prevalence of heart disease and its high morbidity rate in Americans was the focus when the pyramid was introduced. At that time, high fat intake was linked to high cholesterol levels and increased risk for heart disease. High fat intake was also linked to certain types of cancer and obesity.

It was observed that most populations, including Americans take in most of their calories from carbohydrates — which include the grain group at the bottom of the pyramid and the fruits and vegetables. Populations who base their diets on grain intake such as Asians, Africans and others have not been seen to exhibit the same rates of heart disease and obesity.

Because carbohydrates contain less than half the calories as fats, it appeared that the substitution of equal fat intake with carbohydrates would lessen calories taken in and let a person lose weight or eat more.

From these recommendations arose the explosion of bagels, pasta and low fat versions of a myriad of foods during the last 10 years. Careful label reading reveals that some of these foods, while lower in fat, are not lower in calories. This simplistic approach to weight loss misled many to overeat carbohydrates and disregard portions, leading us to the present epidemic of obesity in the United States.

Many of the food guide pyramid critics feel that the lowest group on the pyramid, the cereals, grains and pasta, should be replaced with the fruit and vegetable tier. Extremists such as those Atkins Diet zealots, have even suggested that the Meat, Fish and Protein group be the base of the pyramid. Many physicians are skeptical of advocating this diet which restricts carbohydrates to less than 20 percent of calories (present recommendations call for 50-60 percent of total calories eaten).

Carbohydrates are the sole fuel for the brain and nervous system. Until recently, no formal research had tested the Atkins diet but the latest research presented by Eric Westman, an internist at Duke pitted the Atkins diet against the American Heart Association Step 1 diet, a widely used low-fat approach. Results for the 120 participants showed greater weight loss (31 pounds versus 20) and improvement of some blood lipid values over six months. Research involving greater numbers and longer periods of time are examining this subject further.

Not everyone needs to lose weight and research in essential nutrients done in the 19th and 20th centuries has taught us that we need a variety of foods in our diet each day to avoid nutritional deficiencies and diseases. Eating the pyramid way will meet these needs.

The food guide pyramid is presently being reviewed by those who created it — the United States Department of Agriculture, Human Nutrition Information Service.

Comments are being accepted from the public. If you would like to express your opinion regarding how a revised pyramid might appear, contact Carole Davis (Carole.Davis@cnpp.usda.gov) at the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion.

**Ten Indicators of a Healthy Marriage**

COLUMBUS, Ohio—A strong, healthy marriage isn't a matter of luck or romance, says Ted Futris, family life specialist for Ohio State University Extension. It takes work and compatibility.

"Some factors that contribute to a healthy relationship are static—they're things you can't really change," Futris said. "Others are things that are dynamic—things that you can work on to improve your relationship." Either way, they're important to know for anyone who is married or is thinking of marriage, he said.

Marriage Week USA is Feb. 7-14, and Futris hopes couples will take some time during that week to improve their relationship. Futris, a founding member of the Columbus Marriage Coalition, shares 10 indicators of a good relationship:

- Fostering good communication. Happy couples talk to each other, and they listen to each other. The best communicators recognize when outside distractions or emotional states are at work to prevent good communication, and find ways to work through them when both partners are ready.

- Resolving conflict in a positive way. According to the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, habitual avoidance of conflict is the No. 1 predictor of divorce. Strong relationships are earmarked by a couple's ability to handle disagreements in a positive manner.
- Having realistic expectations. When people first meet, they put their best foot forward and try to

mask their flaws. This is normal, but couples should realize that as time goes on, the "real" person will emerge. Relationships develop over time, but unrealistic expectations of a partner, or of a relationship, can cause undue stress.

- Paying attention to details of your partner's life. People in strong marriages know their partner well. They know major events in their partner's past, and they know each other's likes, dislikes, hopes and worries. And, they keep updating this information as their partner's world changes.

- Experiencing more positive interactions than negative ones. Some research indicates that successful marriages have five times as many positive interactions as negative ones. Giving positive responses to a partner's bid for attention—whether it's a question, an extended hand, or just a glance—strengthens the relationship.

- Building trust. Trust develops slowly, but it is fostered by communicating honestly and following through on promises.

- Spending time together. Sharing experiences is a good way to build a relationship. Couples who enjoy doing things together—rather than feeling obligated or forced into doing things together—have a stronger, healthier relationship.

- Shared values. Couples who start out with a wide array of shared values—who agree on what's important in life have a better chance at building a solid relationship.

- Shared responsibilities. Both partners have the obligation of nurturing the relationship, keeping the household running smoothly and working toward common goals. Allowing only half of the couple to bear the brunt of these responsibilities can cause resentment to build.

- Adapting to change. People and relationships change over time. That's to be expected, not feared. Even people's expectations of a relationship can change. Partners need to be able to talk about these changes and find ways to adapt to them.

These are just some indicators of healthy relationships, Futris said. To learn more, a free on-line newsletter, "Marriage Matters," is available through Ohio State University Extension at <http://h.c.o.s.u.e.d.u/f.a.m.l.i.f.e/marriagematters/>. Additional information is available through the Web site of the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, <http://www.smartmarriages.com>.

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