

Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

What is nutrition?

Nutrition is the interaction between food and living organisms. The study of nutrition focuses on what eating habits promote good health and decrease the risk of disease.

What are nutrients?

Nutrients are substances that are required by living things for a healthy life. For humans, over fifty substances must be taken into the body in sufficient quantity to meet the body's needs. These nutrients are classified into six groups: carbohydrates, proteins, fats, water, minerals, and vitamins. The United States Recommended Daily Allowance (USRDA) is an average recommendation of the major nutrients that are included in food labeling.

Where do nutrients come from?

The nutrients required by humans come from the food they eat and the liquids they drink. One nutrient, Vitamin D, can be provided by the sun. Most people depend on a network of people to provide them with the food they consume—from farmers and ranchers to food distributors, truck drivers, grocers, and restaurateurs.



What are the nutritional dietary guidelines for Americans?

After numerous studies and years of research, the following guidelines were established for Americans:

- Eat a variety of foods.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Choose a diet low in fat and cholesterol.
- Choose a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits, and grains.
- Use sugar only in moderation.
- Use salt and sodium only in moderation.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

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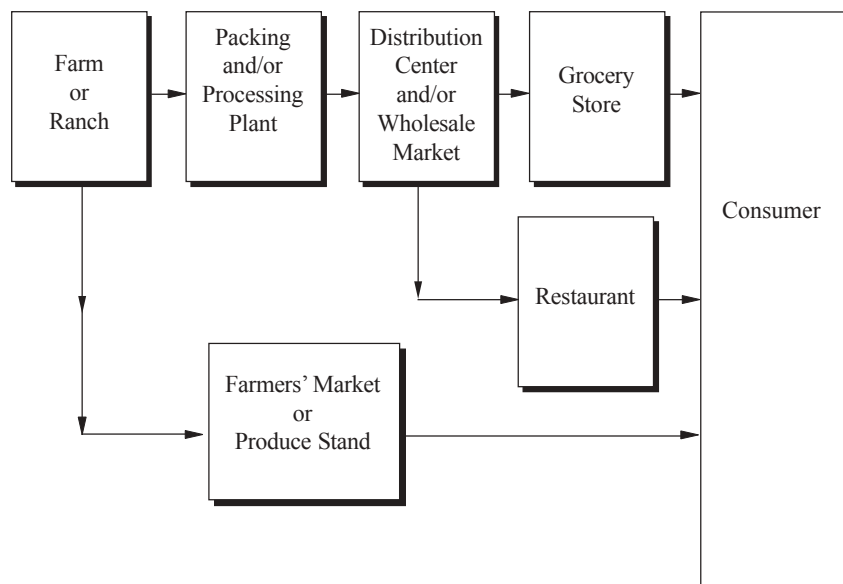
What is the Food Guide Pyramid?

The *Food Guide Pyramid* was developed by the United States Department of Agriculture to give Americans a guidance system on the quantity of food they should eat to maintain good health. It was designed to follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

How does the food get from the farm to the consumer?

Only 1 to 2% of the United States population actually grows the food for all of the people in the United States to consume. Research and technological advances continue to improve agricultural production and assist the farmer in producing plentiful and healthful food. The quantity and variety of fresh produce and other foods available to the United States consumer make it simple and affordable to meet the recommended dietary guidelines.

Generally, the farmers and ranchers produce the food and then utilize a food delivery system similar to the one described below. In some instances, the food goes to a food processor to make items such as tomato sauce, fruit cocktail, and canned soups before heading to a distribution center. In other cases, food is sold directly to the consumer. Such is the case at fruit and vegetable stands and farmers' markets. Fresh produce generally goes from the farm to a packing plant and then to a wholesale market or distribution center before heading to the grocery store or restaurant.



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What is a packing center?

After fruits and vegetables are picked from the fields or orchards, they are transported to a packing center. There the produce is cooled, sorted (by size, color, ripeness, and/or grade), and then packed into appropriate containers such as cartons, lugs, or flats.

Where does fresh produce go after it is properly packed?

The fresh produce may be transported to a distribution center or a wholesale market. Distribution centers are refrigerated to preserve the freshness of fresh fruits and vegetables. The food remains in this location until another truck takes it to a store, wholesale market, or exporter.

How long does it take to get the fruits and vegetables from the farm to the table?

On an average, it takes just a few days for the produce to travel from the farm to homes throughout the country. Even cherries and pears grown in California can reach Japan just two days after shipping. However, some fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, apples, and cucumbers are covered with a water-soluble edible wax before being packed. These items can be stored for over a month before arriving at a supermarket. This is one way fresh produce can be made available over a longer period of time. The agricultural community continues to develop innovative techniques in fresh produce preservation.

What are some current trends in fresh produce?

Fresh produce is eaten by consumers more often if it is prepared for them. Ready-to-eat salads, baby carrots, and cut fruits are now standards in grocery stores. People are also opting to grow some of their produce in schools and community gardens. In some areas, fresh produce can be ordered from local growers and delivered to door steps. The increase in handling and services usually increases the cost of the items.

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How can people be assured that the food they eat is safe?

The United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Environmental Protection Agency personnel continually meet with research scientists, technical experts, farmers, ranchers, and the general public to discuss food safety issues and to establish guidelines and standards for all food processors, handlers, and others involved in food production and distribution. Inspections occur on a regular basis to make sure that the food meets the governmental standards and regulations. The United States currently has the safest food supply in the world and continues to work hard to maintain this position. People in the United States, especially in California, are fortunate to have such a wide variety of healthful fresh fruits and vegetables year-round. At home, there are lots of ways consumers can maintain the quality of their fresh produce. All fruits and vegetables should be washed before eating or cutting them. All bruises should be removed.