

Food Pyramids: What We Eat and Who We Are

AIM

To raise students' awareness of the nutritional value of what they and their families are eating and how what they eat may or may not have changed since they arrived in the United States.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify the food groups as defined by the USDA.
- Interpret the various food pyramids as defined by the USDA.
- Evaluate the food pyramids and how the pyramids relate to their home cultures.
- Access the Internet tools that assist in exercise and healthy diets.
- Share information about their home countries' general food guidelines.

TARGET GROUP

Intermediate to high-level ESL students (level 4 to level 8)

(For the purpose of this lesson, the target group levels range from 1 through 8, with the following guidelines: 1 = beginning, 5 = intermediate, 8 = advanced.) Lessons can also be adapted for 8th-through 12th-grade students on health or health education programs.

LENGTH

4 class periods of 50 to 70 minutes each

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students record what they are eating, compare cultural values of healthy nutrition and evaluate the recommendations of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a guide to eating healthily.

DAY ONE

Schema Building

1. Give students examples of meals—breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks—that were eaten the day before.

Student Name	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snack
Hungry Student	Piece of toast with butter; orange; cup of coffee with sugar	Tuna salad sandwich with mayonnaise, celery and onions; potato chips; candy bar	Chicken with noodles, carrots, mushrooms, oil and broccoli; soda	Banana; potato chips

2. Ask students what Hungry Student ate yesterday, practicing past tense.
Example:
For breakfast, Hungry Student ate a piece of toast, ...
For lunch, she had a tuna salad sandwich, ...
3. Ask students to write down what they ate the day before. As resources, bring in real food items, advertisements and photos. This is a good opportunity to review count and noncount items as well as units and packaging (a dozen, a bag of, a slice of and so on).
4. To practice vocabulary and past tense, have students circulate and ask three other classmates (as linguistically diverse as possible) what they ate. Review past tense and model past tense questions:
Examples:
What did you eat for breakfast yesterday?
What did you have for lunch yesterday?
Did you eat snacks yesterday?

Have students use the following chart to record their findings.

Student Name	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snack

MATERIALS

Food pyramids
www.MyPyramid.gov

The Jungle Effect: A Doctor Discovers the Healthiest Diets From Around the World — Why They Work and How to Bring Them Home, Dr. Daphne Miller, HarperCollins (2008)
www.drdaphne.com/thejungleeffect/index.php

Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?
www.unnaturalcauses.org, Episode 3: “Becoming American” (video excerpt can be streamed at www.unnaturalcauses.org/video_clips_detail.php?res_id=215)

5. Give students a copy of the latest USDA Food Pyramid. This food pyramid changes often. This is the latest version from 2005. The approximate percentages of food in each category are listed below the pyramid.
6. Review the different categories of food (grains, vegetables, fruits, oils, milk/dairy, meat/beans), eliciting examples of each. If you have access to a computer, go to www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/index.html to show lists of food from each category.

Food Pyramid’s New Dimensions



Grains Vegetables Fruits Oils Milk Meat & Beans
 30% 22% 15% 2% 21% 10%

From www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/index.html

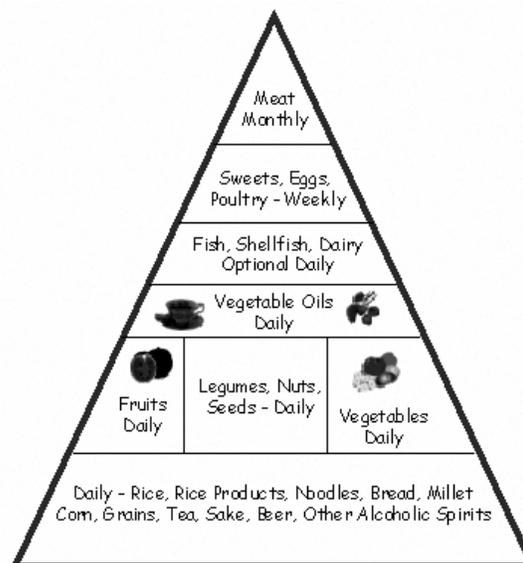
7. Have the students sit in groups of four and look at their menus from the prior day.

Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Oils	Milk/Dairy	Meat/Beans

8. Alternatively, each student can write what he or she ate on slips of colored paper and put them into piles under the appropriate heading.
9. Have students try to figure out approximate percentages for each category of food they ate.

DAY TWO

1. As a class, discuss whether you think the food pyramid offers a healthy diet. This should not be a simple yes or no.
 - Elicit disagreement and honest discussion.
 - Discuss financial limitations.
 - Compare and contrast students' different views about what constitutes a healthy diet.
 - Compare cultural differences and assumptions.
2. Ask students to work in small groups and choose a different food pyramid model from the selection provided by Google images at <http://images.google.com/images?hl=en&q=food+pyramids&btnG=Search+Images&gbv=2>. Students can choose the Asian food pyramid, the Traditional Chinese Medicine pyramid, the Latin American pyramid or the Okinawa (Japanese) pyramid and take notes on the key features of the model they are examining.
3. Ask each group to share its findings. Then as a class discuss the following questions.
 - How are these models similar? How are they different?
 - Why are there so many differences?
 - Do we know anything about the health of these regions and if this is related to the foods people eat?
 - Are food habits changing around the world, away from traditional diets? If so, why?



Sample Asian model

From www.dietbites.com/Pyramid-Diet/asian-pyramid.gif

DAY THREE

1. Pass out the following from an interview with Dr. Daphne Miller, published in her book *The Jungle Effect: A Doctor Discovers the Healthiest Diets From Around the World — Why They Work and How to Bring Them Home*. The book and the website are great sources of information on this topic.

www.drdaphne.com/thejungleeffect/index.php

The full interview is available at

www.gourmet.com/foodpolitics/2008/05/jungleeffect_QA

Christy Harrison Talks with Dr. Miller

CH: *Your chapter about diabetes was really interesting Your patient had tried the low-carb regime without any success, and he decided that he'd be better off just eating what his Mexican grandmother ate, because she was healthy—so he starts eating these massive burritos every day, from a taqueria in San Francisco.*

DM: *Yes, for me probably one of the most profound moments was when I was in Copper Canyon, Mexico, and I bought burritos there and compared them to what we call a burrito in San Francisco. You can barely call it the same animal. But that happens everywhere. Look at Chinese food versus Chinese American food. The first time I ate authentic Chinese food I just couldn't even believe it, because Chinese American food is this sickly sweet, white-flour stuff with the occasional vegetable and chunks of deep fried meat—this is what we think of as Chinese food.*

2. Elicit opinions of how Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Thai and other ethnic foods in the United States compare with the traditional foods in the country of origin.

In multicultural groups, have students compare their traditional meals with how those meals are prepared in local restaurants.

3. Watch the clip from *Unnatural Causes, Episode 3: "Becoming American."*

According to the web site's introduction to the video excerpt, "[r]ecent Latino immigrants are healthier than the average American, despite being generally poorer. Researchers believe that some aspects of immigrant communities may protect health. But for Latinos, the longer they are here, the worse their health becomes. Why?"

The video excerpt can be streamed at

www.unnaturalcauses.org/video_clips_detail.php?res_id=215

After viewing, discuss the clip, what the experts have to say, and the implications for students' health and the health of their families.

Homework assignment: Have students chart their meals/snacks for the next 24 hours.

DAY FOUR

- 1.** Ask for students' food charts from their homework assignment.
- 2.** Using the USDA food pyramid, chart an example of a student's meals, placing the foods in their appropriate categories.

Group Work

Have students create their own food pyramid.

- In a computer lab, show a video clip from the website www.mypyramid.gov/podcasts/index.html
- Under "Subjects," click on "My Pyramid Menu Planner." Explain to the students how to log in and that they don't need to use their real name.

DEVELOPED BY **TERRI MASSIN**, ESL INSTRUCTOR AT CITY COLLEGE OF SAN FRANCISCO