

“If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.”

- **Maya Angelou**

This quote is super timely because 2026 is already promising to be the year of change and I’m all in for it. Personally, I anticipate a lot of changes in my own world and I’m excited for those changes come to fruition. The reality is that sometimes, if you want to see a change for the better, you have to take things into your own hands. That’s exactly what I plan to do. This quote is also a great reminder that if you can’t change something because it’s completely out of your control, what you do have the ability to control is your attitude. Change can be scary, but at the same time, it can also be exhilarating. Keep in mind that change can create opportunities and give people the opportunity to make a new normal anything they want it to be. Change may appear bleak at the onset, but the final result could ultimately be wonderful. I’ll close these thoughts about change with a quote from one of my favorite authors, the late great Dr. Wayne Dyer, who said, *“Change the way you look at things and the things you look at will change.”*

Yours in health,

Susan Monaco, Certified Health Coach
Health and Wellness by Design
www.healthnwellnessbydesign.com
susan@healthnwellnessbydesign.com

Understanding the New Food Pyramid



Last week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (“HHS”) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (“USDA”) released new Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025–2030, which was accompanied by a newly redesigned food pyramid graphic. The new and the old pyramids are shown in the picture above. The change is dramatic and was desperately needed. It represents the most substantial revision of federal nutrition policy in decades and is a reset government officials say is aimed at improving public health by encouraging consumption of *“real food.”* I couldn’t be more thrilled by this change, which has been a very long time in coming. This new pyramid reverses the hierarchy used in earlier models in which foods once placed at the bottom are now at the top. This signals a much greater priority on a healthy real-food diet. Thankfully, foods that were previously emphasized for daily consumption have been scaled way back.

Since many of you probably aren’t as obsessed with this type of thing as I am, I thought it would be helpful to outline the key changes made in the new food pyramid.

The Pyramid and Priorities were Inverted: The pyramid now places the most recommended foods at the top and the least recommended at the bottom, the complete opposite of past versions. Major categories now stack from most desirable (top) for consumption to least favorable (bottom) in the following order:

1. Protein, full-fat dairy, and healthy fats
2. Vegetables and fruits
3. Whole grains

Protein Gets a Leading and Well-Deserved Role and Full-Fat Dairy and Fats are Reassessed: These foods form the bulk of the new pyramid and are emphasized as the *foundation* of most meals. Americans are now advised to consume significantly more protein than what was recommended in past guidelines. The new recommendation is roughly 1.2-1.6 grams per kilogram of body weight per day, an amount I’ve recommended to my clients for years, instead of 0.8 g/kg. Protein sources include both animal and plant-based options such as eggs, meat, poultry, fish, beans, nuts, and seeds. From this list, I’d specifically recommend grass-fed organic beef, milk-fed pork, wild-caught (not farmed) fish, and free-range eggs. These will be more expensive, but if you can afford it, do it. Additionally, unlike earlier guidance that pushed low-fat products, the new model embraces full-fat dairy such as milk, cheese and yogurt, (without added sugars), and healthy fats (such as olive oil, nuts, avocados). If you can find raw milk, that’s even healthier. I now make my own yogurt from raw milk, which is unfortunately, not legal to be purchased in some states, unless you own a herd-share. I hope this too, will change under these HHS and USDA Secretaries. The longstanding recommended limit on saturated fat (of ≤10% of calories) remains, even though the language around fats is more relaxed than before. These foods are the largest part of the new pyramid, meaning they are recommended **more** frequently than the others.

Fruits and Vegetables: The new recommendation is 3 servings of vegetables and 2 servings of fruit per day. Colorful vegetables and fruits are key components, as they are rich in vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Think cruciferous veggies (broccoli, cauliflower), leafy greens (arugula, spinach), berries, oranges, apples, etc.

Avoid Processed Foods and Added Sugar: There is strong advice to reduce ultra-processed and highly-refined foods, especially packaged snacks, sugary drinks, and refined white flour products. Added sugars are framed as having no beneficial amount, and adults are urged to keep added sugars below about 10 grams per meal and start to approach “no amount” as ideal. Remember, when the low-fat craze became the norm, the fat in products was typically replaced with sugar, which was one of the worst things to happen to our daily diets and one of the reasons people gained weight while eating “low-fat”. On a side note, if you’re doing your own cooking, look to replace sugar with things like stevia or monk fruit. Both are natural sweeteners and great substitutes for calorie-laden and unhealthy sugar.

Whole Grains Relegated to the Bottom: Whole grains are still included, but thankfully, unlike past models that put them at the base, (indicating the most servings per day should come from this category), whole grains are now a much smaller portion, with a suggested limit of about 2–4 servings per day. Refined grains and ultra-processed grain products are discouraged. Previous guidelines emphasized them much more broadly.

Change in Alcohol Guidance: Past dietary guidance suggested specific daily limits for alcohol. This new version advises us to “consume less alcohol for better overall health” without precise amounts. I’m not sure how I feel about this guidance because everyone will likely have a differing opinion of what “less alcohol” is. I don’t know why a more specific amount wasn’t recommended.

Why was this pyramid shift made? Officials argue that chronic diet-related illnesses (like obesity and type-2 diabetes) are a national health crisis. This can be tied to directly to poor eating patterns, which tend to be dominated by processed foods. The new guidelines are meant to simplify nutrition messages and to steer Americans toward healthier whole foods, with specific emphasis on protein and healthy fats for sustained energy and metabolic health. HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. described the changes as a “historic reset” of federal nutrition policy aimed at giving people actionable, realistic advice about what to eat. What I love most about this change is that it’s ultimately encouraging people to “shop the perimeter” of the grocery store, where these healthier and more natural foods are kept.

How People Will Be Impacted?

- **Everyday Eating:** You’ll hopefully see a shift toward higher-protein meals and more dairy in your grocery cart. Whole real foods like fresh vegetables, fruits, eggs, nuts, and lean meats should become the *default* diet centerpiece. Foods high in refined flour, sugar, and preservatives should be consumed less often or even avoided.
- **School & Federal Programs:** These new guidelines ultimately influence what’s served in school lunch programs, military mess halls, and federal nutrition assistance programs (such as SNAP). The great news about this is that food procurement and nutrition standards in schools and community programs should start reflecting the new emphasis on protein, dairy, and reduced processed foods.
- **Economic and Access Considerations:** Experts and industry analysts note that these newly prioritized foods (especially fresh produce and quality proteins) can cost more and may be harder to access for some households, potentially widening disparities in diet affordability. But those populations, which could potentially be negatively impacted, will be helped by the new school and federal standards by now having access to these healthier foods.
- **Reactions from Health Professionals:** Like with any change, there will be those (like me) who enthusiastically embrace and applaud the focus on cutting ultra-processed foods and moving to “whole foods”. Others, especially those who don’t benefit from a healthy population (and we know who they are), will caution that the prominence of red meat and saturated fats diverges from decades of research linking those to heart disease. Much of this so-called “research” was clearly fake news, designed to keep us unhealthy. It worked.

In my humble opinion, the new food pyramid is more than just a graphic, it’s a MAJOR shift in national nutrition policy to place focus on whole foods, higher protein intake and healthy fats, and to move away from refined carbs and ultra-processed foods. Its short-term influence will be most visible in public meal programs and dietary messaging, with broader consumer adoption evolving over time. This is exactly the change Secretary Kennedy promised in his confirmation hearings. For more than two decades, he prayed about reducing the chronic disease epidemic, especially in children, which has overtaken our country. This dramatic change is Step One in his mission to achieve that goal.

The health of our citizens has been in a downhill spiral for decades. Currently, 70% of Americans have a chronic disease or are overweight or obese. A whopping one-third of our children are either diabetic or pre-diabetic. This is mainly driven by food and we just can’t continue down this unhealthy path. We spend \$5 TRILLION annually on health, which is three times per capita more than European countries spend and we have the worst health outcomes. According to Secretary Kennedy, a staggering 40 cents of every tax dollar go toward food-induced chronic diseases. Additionally, 90% of American health-care dollars are being spent on chronic diseases. The only way to lower our health-care costs is by helping Americans to change their diets and start eating healthy foods. This is the first major step in getting back on the path to better health. It will certainly take time, but there’s no time like the present to get started. If you want more information or need some meal-planning suggestions, that’s what I do so be sure to reach out. **#EatRealFood** and have a wonderful month!