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The ABCs of Nutrition



In This Chapter

- ◆ How to read the Food Guide Pyramid
- ◆ Your child's caloric needs
- ◆ The truth about protein, carbohydrates, and fats
- ◆ The essential vitamins and minerals for your child's growth
- ◆ What's up with iron and fiber

Remember when you first learned the ABCs? Let me shake the cobwebs in your brain and bring the experience back to life: Someone was teaching you the alphabet, but all you saw was a mishmash of letters that looked upside down, inside out, and flipped over. Eventually, you learned that when you put them together, you form words, and that words form sentences, and so on.

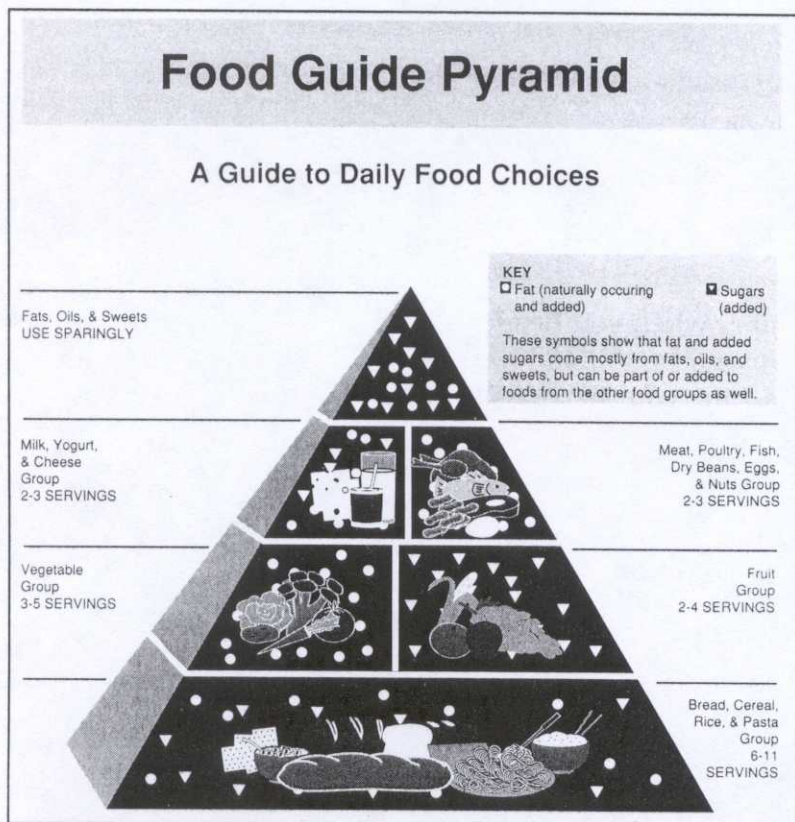
You were taking the world through your eyes—and into your hands.

Well, that's how it is with nutrition. *Proteins, carbohydrates, fiber,* and other words may sound like gobbledygook to you now. But once you learn what food is made out of and how much of what to eat to be healthy, you can take control of your nutrition—and guide your children toward leading a healthful lifestyle.

In this chapter, we're going to learn—or recap what we learned in elementary school—about the macro-nutrients, vitamins and minerals, fiber, and why we need to eat a good balance of all of them. The terminology isn't thrilling, but stick with it because learning this stuff could mean the difference between living a healthy life or heading down the road to heart disease.

THE USDA PYRAMID: BRICKS AND MORTAR FOR EATING RIGHT

The Food Guide Pyramid, the colorful Egyptian triangle created by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 1992, lays out a general guideline of what you and your family should eat to remain healthy and avoid most heart disease. You've seen it a zillion times on cereal boxes, pasta packages, and milk containers. But have you ever applied it to your child's diet?



The USDA food guide pyramid.