

# The Latin American Food Pyramid

The Latin American Diet Pyramid is an educational guide to healthy eating that relies on familiar, inexpensive, tasty, healthy, and easy-to-prepare foods. It is a tradition-based diet that bridges the gaps between the cultural and scientific characteristics of food. It incorporates the foods, culinary traditions, practicalities of food availability, and sustainability of diets ranging throughout the vastness of Latin America.

The dietary patterns followed by the people of Latin America are a result of the food traditions in regions inhabited primarily by the Aztecs, the Incas, and the Mayas, as well as dietary traditions that emerged following the arrival of Columbus to the present time. Variations of the Latin American diet have existed in parts of Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and the Southern edge of the United States. The pyramid considers the regions that represent Latin America, the dietary patterns historically associated with good health, a convergence of historical Latin American dietary patterns and current scientific understanding of what constitutes optimal nutrition.

***This pyramid offers similarities to the MyPyramid by suggesting that a healthful diet begins with the same basis of lots of grains, fresh fruits, and vegetables. Major differences from the USDA pyramid include:***

- **Maize, Potatoes, Rice, Bread, Taro, Tortillas, Arepas, Black Beans, Seeds, Quinoa, Malanga, Peanuts, Amaranth, Legumes, Cassava, Pecans, Sweet Potatoes, Pumpkin, Plantains, Yuca, Garbanzo Beans, Pinto Beans** receive greater emphasis in the grain group
- **Limes, Bananas, Avocados, Cacao, Breadfruit, Plums, Apples, Berries, Papayas, Mangos, Cherimoya, Guanabana, Pineapple, Melon, Tamarind, Quince, Grapes, Guava, Oranges, Kiwi** receive greater emphasis in the fruit group.
- **Kale, Cactus, Eggplant, Turnip, Chard, Squash, Zucchini, Onions, Broccoli, Okra, Spinach, Lettuce, Tomatoes, Tomatillos, Sweet Peppers, Chiles** receive more emphasis in the vegetable group.
- **Using plant oils, like olive oil, as the primary fat**
- **Allowing for only moderate amounts of milk products**
- **Using fish and poultry, rather than red meat, as the main source of high protein food from animals**

***Just like the MyPyramid structure, the Latin American Diet Pyramid promotes daily physical activity.***



# Carbohydrates: Yes or No?

Some people seem to still be asking, "Are carbs good or bad in your diet?"

## **The answer: Yes and No**

### **Here's the scoop:**

Carbohydrates are the muscle and brains main fuel source and should compromise about 50-65% of your daily calorie intake. The range varies depending on your overall calorie needs, medical needs and level of physical activity.

Carbs basically got a bad rap because people were eating too many carbs (not paying attention to their portions) and because people were eating too many of the wrong types of carbs. Your goal should be to make sure that of all the carbs you eat, the majority are coming from food sources that are rich in complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and fiber.

*For example, which do you think is a healthier carb choice - A sweet potato or a bag of regular potato chips? **Answer** – the sweet potato because it is one of the richest food sources of Vitamin A and it contains more nutrients and fiber compared to the fat and salt laden potato chips. *Here is another question.* Which is better - a bowl of oatmeal or a bowl of high-sugar kids cereal? **Answer** – the oatmeal, provided it isn't saturated with added sugars. The oatmeal is high in fiber and tends to contribute to a healthier blood cholesterol profile and blood sugar stability.*

***So to really answer the question of whether carbs are good or bad, you need to ask yourself two questions:***

- 1) Do the majority of the carbohydrates I eat come from whole grains, fruits and vegetables or are they mostly snack foods and products made from refined white flour?**
- 2) Even if I eat healthier carbs, am I eating the right portions?**

For more information on proper portions, check out the MyPyramid website at [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov) and start logging in the foods you eat using the MyPyramid tracker tool.

**Enjoy your carbs.....feel energetic!**

# news flash

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