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## Pyramid Scheme – Are the USDA Nutrition Guidelines Healthy or a Hoax?

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By Andrew Weatherford

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*In 2005, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released MyPyramid, an updated version of their first food pyramid from 1992. Although the newer plan includes recommendations for exercise and offers more detailed, personalized guidance than the original, some nutritionists feel that MyPyramid still does not measure up to current dietary research and accepted wisdom.*

*Does the USDA have American's best interests at heart? Or are they more concerned about looking out for the grain and milk industries?*

*Heather Fleming, a nutrition consultant with Conscious Nutrition, feels that those two industries did influence the development of MyPyramid. "Definitely" she says. "Money always plays a role."*

### Milk....Stash the Stache?

*The milk mustache campaign may be ubiquitous, but some experts are questioning whether milk really does do a body good. The Harvard School of Public Health's website states that milk "isn't the only, or even best" calcium source. "Milk has been marketed very well as the way we get our calcium...[but] dairy is for fun, not for health," Ms. Fleming warns.*

### Grains....You Bread-Or Not?

*The dominant role of grains in the American diet has also been called into question. The original 1992 food pyramid prominently featured grains as its foundation, with recommendations for 6-11 daily servings. MyPyramid continues to place an emphasis on grain consumption, recommending 6 ounces of grains a day for people on a 2000-calorie diet (and up to 10 ounces of grains a day for active young males).*

*However, the low-carb revolution turned the original pyramid on its head, as people were urged to avoid breads, cereals, and other grains as much as possible. The popularity of low-carb diets may have peaked earlier this decade, but new research continues to come out in favor of curbing carbohydrates. A 2007*

Stanford University study finds that the Atkins diet offers other health benefits, including improved cholesterol and blood pressure levels, besides helping dieters lose weight.

## Nothing But Hieroglyphics

With the confusion over which foods are healthy and unhealthy, it may come as no surprise that 72 million Americans are obese, according to the latest figures released by the Center for Disease Control in 2007.

"Our health care system isn't always promoting preventive health care with correct nutrition application," Ms. Fleming says. "Not that there's always a perfect right or wrong, but there's definitely a healthier foundation...than MyPyramid."

Other plans have been developed in recent years that are arguably more accurate, such as the Harvard School of Public Health's Healthy Eating Pyramid. Nutrition consultant Heather Fleming has developed a Food Tree, with vegetables as the trunk and healthy fats, carbohydrates, and proteins as its branches. However, when it comes to fame and recognition, the USDA MyPyramid remains the King Tut of nutritional guidelines. As Americans become even more determined to understand what it means to truly eat healthy, the debate will continue to rage over whether MyPyramid should be entombed.

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The big problem with milk is that the pasteurization and homogenization processes destroy the enzymes that milk contains that allow your body to easily digest it. Without those enzymes, you get lactose intolerance -- but more importantly, your body cannot process calcium in the presence of protein (both in milk). So unless your milk is \*raw\*, it's a horrible source of calcium, period.

And you nailed the Grains bit on the head. My nutritionist's take on the Healthy Eating Pyramid has my wife (who used to weigh nearly twice what I did) eating almost no grain-based foods, and she's lost almost a pound a week for a year and a half.

**[Michael Danielson](#)**

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