Dr. Fuhrman’s Nutritarian Pyramid

Dr. Fuhrman’s Nutritarian food pyramid is based on the principles of high nutrient eating as illustrated by his Health Equation: Health = Nutrients / Calories (H = N / C). Low-calorie, nutrient dense foods are at the base of the pyramid, and high-calorie, nutrient poor foods are at the top. As nutrient density decreases, the quantity of room in the diet decreases.

Nutritional science in the last twenty years has demonstrated that colorful plant foods contain a huge assortment of protective compounds, most of which still remain unnamed. Only by eating an assortment of nutrient-rich natural foods can we access these protective compounds and prevent the common diseases that afflict Americans. Our modern, low-nutrient eating style has led to an overweight population, the majority of whom develop diseases of nutritional ignorance, causing our medical costs to spiral out of control.

The base of the pyramid – the foundation of the diet, foods consumed in the highest quantity – should be the foods with the highest ratios of nutrients to calories – these are vegetables. Ninety percent of the daily diet should be made up of nutrient rich plant foods, whose calories are accompanied by health-promoting phytochemicals: green and other non-starchy vegetables; fresh fruits; beans and legumes; raw nuts, seeds, and avocados; starchy vegetables; and whole grains.

If desired, the remaining 10% of the diet may include minimally processed foods such as tortillas, coarsely-ground or sprouted whole grain breads or cereals, tofu, tempeh and a limited amount of animal products, preferably not more than 5 percent of total caloric intake. By keeping low nutrient foods to a minimum and striving to eat at least 90% of calories from the unrefined plant foods that comprise the base of the pyramid each day, you construct a health-promoting, disease-preventing diet. This high nutrient eating style is considered a Nutritarian™ diet.

Dr. Fuhrman’s Food Pyramid vs. USDA Pyramid

The USDA’s pyramid bases the diet around grains, dairy, and meat, rather than vegetables – only 2-3 servings each of vegetables and fruits are recommended. Their pyramid reflects the American diet as it is – centered on animal products and processed foods rather than whole plant foods.

- The USDA pyramid allows for multiple servings daily of dairy, meat, and oils – nutrient poor foods that should be limited to 2 or less servings per week in Dr. Fuhrman’s Pyramid. These foods do not contribute beneficial micronutrients and therefore do not deserve such prominent positions in the diet. For example, the USDA pyramid recommends approximately 3 servings of dairy per day for adults. Dairy products are not essential for good health, and contribute saturated fat and animal protein, both of which should be limited to prevent chronic disease.
- The USDA pyramid places the most emphasis on
Dr. Fuhrman's Nutritarian Pyramid places more emphasis on vegetables than the USDA Choose My Plate icon. The USDA pyramid combines meat and beans into one category, whereas Dr. Fuhrman's pyramid places the most emphasis on vegetables. They recommend that half of grain servings each day are whole grain rather than refined – this leaves too much room for dangerous refined carbohydrate products in the diet, and less room for fruit and vegetable servings. Although whole grains are healthful, their nutrient density is not as great as those of the other unrefined plant foods. In Dr. Fuhrman's pyramid, whole grains can be included daily, but are limited; fresh fruits, vegetables, and beans, because of their high nutrient to calorie ratios, can be eaten in unlimited quantities.

- The USDA pyramid combines meat and beans into one category. Both meat and beans are sources of protein, but it is important to differentiate between these since meat is a disease-promoting food and beans are a health-promoting food. The protein in meat is packaged with saturated fat and cholesterol, and the protein in beans is packaged with fiber and phytochemicals. Meat contains no fiber or phytochemicals. Beans help you maintain your weight by promoting satiety, protect against cancer, and help to keep cholesterol levels down. In Dr. Fuhrman's pyramid, beans are eaten daily and meat is limited to two servings or less per week.
- The USDA pyramid does not convey the importance of nuts and seeds for good health – there is no 'nut and seed' food group. Nuts and seeds are also included in the meat and beans category. In Dr. Fuhrman's Pyramid, nuts and seeds are included every day because of their potent cardiovascular benefits. Because of their calorie density, they should be limited for individuals trying to lose weight.

Dr. Fuhrman's Nutritarian Pyramid is based on the foods that are the richest in micronutrients and have shown consistent benefits to health and longevity in scientific studies. The USDA pyramid treats these protective foods as "side dishes," and allows the vast majority of calories to be obtained from nutrient poor foods.