

March is National Nutrition Month; time to take a look back over the past 50 years of Nutrition....

In the early 1940's, during the midst of World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt started a National Nutrition Conference to help people deal with the food shortage during the war. From this, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) came up with recommendations for Americans to follow so that they would receive essential nutrients to maintain a healthy diet. They came up with what they called "The Basic Seven," which altered nutritional guidelines to deal with the food shortage. These included 1) Green and yellow vegetables; 2) Oranges, tomatoes and grapefruit; 3) Potatoes, other vegetables and fruits; 4) Milk and dairy products; 5) Meat, poultry, fish, eggs and dried peas and beans; 6) Bread, flour and cereals; and 7) Butter and fortified margarine. The trouble with "The Basic Seven" was that it gave the basics on what to eat but did not say how much or address specifics. The USDA kept the guidelines throughout the food shortage but realized that "The Basic Seven" needed an improvement.

In 1956, they introduced "The Basic Four:" 1) Milk, 2) Meat, 3) Fruits and Vegetables, and 4) Grain products. The new guidelines were used for the next 20 years. In the 1970's, however, chronic diseases like stroke and heart disease were on the rise. So the USDA came up with a new idea. They decided to add another category to "The Basic Four:" fats, sweets, and alcoholic beverages. These were to be consumed in moderation. The USDA crossed their fingers in hopes that this would solve the health crisis in America.

Almost two decades later, however, Americans were still unaware that there were established food guidelines. So, in 1988, they decided to come up with a picture to represent the groups. The purpose of this graphic was to show the different foods to eat, how much of each to eat, and what to eat in moderation. They believed a pyramid would be an ideal picture. It took several years, but "The Food Guide Pyramid" was released in 1992.

The purpose of "The Food Guide Pyramid" was to reduce the rate of chronic disease but the rate did not go down. The USDA realized that the pyramid had some shortcomings. For example, the entire population was grouped into one category, when growing children and mature adults have significantly different nutritional needs. Also, physical activity was not addressed, even though it is a key to a healthy lifestyle. Another large problem was that there was no distinction within the food categories. For example, "The Food Guide Pyramid" called for 6-11 servings of grains but did not mention the differences between healthy whole grains and unhealthy refined white grains. Something had to be done.

For years, a new pyramid has been in the works. This pyramid must be personalized online and addresses the needs of individuals by age, sex, and physical activity instead of grouping the population into one category, which is where it gets its name, *MyPyramid*.

