

Food Diary Instructions

Don't be intimidated by the meal-tracking worksheet! Getting a handle on your personal nutrition is like getting a handle on your finances—if you want to know how much you're "spending," you have to write everything down. The first day or two may seem difficult, but after that, keeping the food diary will become part of your routine.

Use one form per day to record everything you eat and drink (except water) on that day. A sample completed food diary for one day, with explanations, can be seen at [\[link\]](#).

Type of food

Write down the type of food you ate, organized by food group. Use separate lines to include sauces, gravies, and other "extras," like salad dressing, mayonnaise, butter, sour cream, sugar, or ketchup. For more information on food groups, see "Inside the Pyramid" at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/index.html>.

Foods that don't fit neatly into one group—a slice of cheese pizza, for example—needs to be broken into its components and entered into different groups. In the case of cheese pizza, those groups would be grains (crust), vegetable (tomato sauce), and milk (cheese). More information on how to count "mixed dishes" is at http://www.mypyramid.gov/tips_resources/mixed_food_information.html.

Amount

In this space, indicate the amount of the particular food item you ate. Measure or estimate the size (e.g., 2" x 1" x 1"), the volume (e.g., 1/2 cup), the weight (e.g., 2 ounces), and/or the number of items (e.g., 12) of that type of food. For more information on estimating portion size when exact weight or measures are not available, these rules of thumb may help:

- Three ounces of meat, poultry, or fish = a deck of playing cards
- One-half cup of fruit, vegetables, pasta, or rice = half a baseball, a small fist, or a light bulb
- One ounce of cheese = your thumb or two dominos
- One cup of milk, yogurt, or chopped fresh greens = a small hand holding a tennis ball
- A teaspoon of butter or margarine = the tip of your thumb to the first joint
- Two tablespoons of peanut butter = a ping pong ball
- One ounce of chocolate = 1 package of dental floss
- One-half teaspoon of oil = 1 thimble

Based on amount eaten, fill in the number of ounce-equivalents (for Grain and Meat & Beans groups) or cup-equivalents (for Fruit, Vegetable, and Milk groups). For grains, also indicate whether the food item was a whole grain or not. For more information on quantity equivalents in each food group, see below.

Calories

Use this column to keep track of the calories you are consuming. The "Nutrition Information" label that appears on most packaged foods will have this information, but bear in mind that "one serving" according to the label, may be more or less than the serving equivalents in your MyPyramid eating plan. For example, a typical English muffin package defines a serving as "one muffin," but each muffin weighs two ounces, so a single muffin counts as two one-ounce grain servings. For more information on food labels, see "How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label" at <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html>.

These online resources will help you find calorie counts for many other foods:

- USDA nutrient database: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/>
- General calorie counter: <http://www.thecaloriecounter.com/>

Information about foods served in restaurants can be found in the nutrition information section of many restaurant websites.

Discretionary calories

Use this column to keep track of the discretionary calories you are consuming. Some food choices will use no discretionary calories at all, while other foods or beverages (e.g. alcohol) will come entirely from your discretionary calorie allowance. For still other foods, some, but not all, of the calories need to be deducted from your daily discretionary calorie allowance. This would include the calories from, for example, added sugars in juices or cereals, or fat in dairy products. For more about discretionary calories, see "What are discretionary calories" at http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/discretionary_calories.html.

Quantity equivalents for each food group

Grains

The following each count as a one-ounce-equivalent of grains: 1/2 cup cooked rice, pasta, or cooked cereal; 1 ounce dry pasta or rice; 1 slice bread; half an English muffin; 1 small muffin (1 oz); 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal flakes.

Fruits and vegetables

The following each count as a 1/2-cup-equivalent of fruits or vegetables: 1/2 cup cut-up raw or cooked fruit or vegetable, 1 medium-size piece of fruit, 1/4 cup dried fruit, 1/2 cup fruit or vegetable juice, 1 cup leafy salad greens.

Meat and beans

The following each count as a 1-ounce-equivalent of meat or beans: 1 ounce lean meat, poultry, or fish; 1 egg; 1/4 cup cooked dry beans or tofu; 1 Tbsp peanut butter; 1/2 ounce nuts or seeds.

Milk/Dairy

The following each count as a 1-cup-equivalent of milk: 1 cup milk or yogurt; 1.5 ounces natural cheese, such as Cheddar cheese; 2 ounces processed cheese. (Discretionary calories must be used for all choices in this category, except fat-free milk.)

Oils

This category includes vegetable oils, soft vegetable oil spreads, and soft margarine with zero *trans* fat added to foods during processing, cooking, or at the table. This category does *not* include solid fats, such as the fat in dairy products, meats, and certain baked goods, which are part of the discretionary calorie allowance.