

MyPyramid for Kids Released

For the first time, the USDA has created a kid-friendly food pyramid. *MyPyramid for Kids* is aimed at children ages 6 to 11, combining dietary advice with the internet, using an interactive game, lesson plans, colorful posters, flyers, and tips for families to promote healthy lifestyles.

The messages in the new pyramid are not different from the adult version. The junior MyPyramid features information based on the 2005 guidelines, encouraging children to eat more brightly-colored fruits and vegetables; chose whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean protein; and limit processed foods and drinks, especially those with unhealthful fat and added sugar. Physical activity is a big part of the kids' pyramid. *MyPyramid for Kids* shows a cartoon figure running up the pyramid, as in the adult version. However, kids are encouraged to get 60 minutes of physical activity per day, two times the minimum recommendation for healthy adults.

In announcing the new design, USDA Secretary Mike Johanns said: "This is a fun approach to addressing the very serious problem of childhood obesity. Messages about the importance of healthy eating and physical activity will take hold through the online pyramid's features and interactive game."

Will *MyPyramid for Kids* actually appeal to kids? A lot of good information is provided on the site; the materials are colorful and fun looking. Yet, the main page on the website for kids does not even include pictures. Some of the activities seem to be complex for the younger age groups. The MyPyramid Worksheet asks kids to identify food goals based on ounce equivalents and cups. How many adults are accurately able to identify an ounce of meat? The interactive game, "Blast Off," teaches kids how to reach Planet Power by fueling their rocket with food and physical activity. A wrong choice (for example, soda or chips) causes the rocket to sputter and cough black smoke. It's not always clear why the rocket did not take off, which may be confusing for the younger children; the older age bracket may get bored from the game after playing it once.

MyPyramid for Kids may be a better tool for teacher and parents interested in teaching kids about healthy living. Lesson plans, grouped in sections of three, are age-appropriate, providing nutrition and physical activity information that can be included in core curriculum. Parent outreach materials are provided with many of the lesson plans. Messages would best be conveyed if children and adults sat down together.

MyPyramid for Kids does get the right message to kids, through their own efforts or via teachers and parents, to "Eat Right. Exercise. Have Fun." See MyPyramid for Kids yourself at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/kids>.