



A little understanding makes Daily Nutrition *straightforward*

By Tracey Karele - AIM Nutritionist

These days everyone has an opinion as to what, when and where we should be eating. The media bombards us with information: the latest fads in diets, calorie-counting websites, food tables and tips for healthy eating and weight loss are everywhere, but can we trust this information?

There are a number of reliable tools available to help us but the jargon involved can sometimes be a bit overwhelming. The following article attempts to explain some dietary basics in order to simplify your daily nutrition requirements.

Any recommendations or advice for establishing nutritional requirements is only a starting point. Daily nutritional requirements vary greatly based on age, weight, health condition, environment, exercise and gender. Finding your individual nutritional requirements is best done with the help of a qualified health practitioner.

DRI's, RDA's & DV's: What does it all mean ?

With all the acronyms being bandied about lately it's hard to keep track of what it is that we actually need every day. Most of us are familiar with the old Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA's) which were a single set of nutrient-specific values. In the mid 1990's, however, this single set of values was replaced by the more comprehensive Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI's). DRI's is a collective term and refers to a set of four nutrient-based reference values comprising of:

- Estimated Average Requirement (EAR) is defined as the intake that meets the estimated needs of a nutrient of 50% of individuals in a specified gender group and at the given age.
- Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) is defined as the intake that meets the nutrient needs of almost all (97-98%) the individuals in that gender group and

at the given age.

- Adequate Intake (AI) is used in cases where the scientific evidence is inadequate to set an EAR. In such cases, the AI is used instead of the RDA.
- Tolerable Upper Intake Level (UL) is defined as the maximum nutrient intake by an individual. UL is used to caution against excessive intake of nutrients that can be harmful in large amounts e.g. vitamin D.

The DRI's differ from the former RDA's in that, in addition to preventing nutritional deficiency, these new reference values also aim to improve the long-term health and well-being of a population by reducing the risk of chronic disease through nutrition.

Another familiar acronym is % DV, meaning Percent Daily Value (as seen on the AIM product labels). Food labels list percentages that are based on recommended daily intakes — meaning the amount of nutrients a person should get each day. These numbers tell you the % DV that one serving of this food provides as a percentage of established standards, helping you to determine if a serving of food is high or low in a particular nutrient.

South African Food Based Dietary Guidelines

These guidelines are short, clear and simple messages that were developed by South African health officials to help individuals to choose an adequate but prudent diet. Although some argue that the guidelines make "misleading and sweeping statements," they were in fact specially developed and tested

for comprehension, appropriateness and applicability for a wide range of demographic groups within South Africa.

These guidelines are:

1. Enjoy a variety of foods
2. Be active
3. Make starchy foods the basis of most meals
4. Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits
5. Eat dry beans, peas, lentils and soy regularly
6. Chicken, fish, milk, meat or eggs can be eaten daily.
7. Eat fats sparingly
8. Use salt sparingly
9. Drink lots of clean, safe water
10. If you drink alcohol, drink sensibly
11. Use food and drinks containing sugar sparingly and not between meals.



The Food Guide Pyramid

The food guide pyramid is a visual representation of what

we should be eating every day. It's not a rigid prescription, but rather a general guideline.

Serving sizes have increased greatly over recent years; the average takeaway hamburger today is literally double the size of a hamburger sold in 20 years ago. This "portion distortion" has resulted in people overeating without even realising it – leading to the "supersize generation." It's not enough to simply eat the right kinds of food to maintain a healthy weight, eating the right amount of food at each meal is just as important. If you are a healthy eater, it is possible to sabotage your efforts by eating more than the recommended amount of food.

The key is portion control and knowing what one serving of each food group represents.

In the bread, cereal, rice and pasta group, an example of 1 serving would be 1 slice of bread, or ½ cup cooked cereal, rice or pasta. With regards to fruit, 1 serving represents a typical portion e.g. 1 medium apple, banana or orange. In the vegetable group, 1 serving typically represents around ½ cup of raw or cooked vegetables (with the exception of leafy vegetables where 1 serving = 1 cup.)

In the milk, yoghurt and cheese group, 1 serving = 1 cup of milk or yoghurt and about 1 ½ oz (± 43g) cheese. In the meat, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts group, 1 serving = 2 - 3 oz of lean, cooked meat, poultry or fish (roughly the size of the palm of your hand or a deck of cards). A serving of cooked beans is ½ cup (or a rounded handful).

