

Little House in the Big Woods

Laura Ingalls Wilder was born on February 7, 1867. Her first memories were of the snug cabin in the “Big Woods” near Pepin, Wisconsin. Little House in the Big Woods was Laura’s first book published in 1932. Children enthusiastically wrote Miss Wilder asking for more stories. She did not know then that the “Little House” series would be favorites for generations and that they would find their place among the best children’s literature.

The “Little House” series is a work of autobiographical fiction. These stories are recollections of events in Laura’s, and later in Almanzo’s, life but the time sequence and/or names of the characters are sometimes altered. The period of each book usually spans approximately a year in the lives of the characters, but in reality not all the events occurred in one year or at one event. For example, baby Carrie is present in Little House in the Big Woods; however, she was actually born during the time of the second book. The events in Little House in the Big Woods with Carrie occurred after the Ingalls returned there from Indian territory. This series is autobiographical in that it relates true events in the characters’ lives, but it remains fiction in that the events recorded are reconstructed for the sake of storytelling.

We see United States history and human nature through Laura’s eyes. When she writes of herself, she remains honest in revealing her own soul to us. This transparency helps us to identify with her struggles—struggles common to all mankind.

Additional Reference Material:

Throughout the “Little House” series Laura mentions the foods prepared and eaten. This general nutrition information is provided to be applied in “Big Woods” and at various times throughout the Primer whenever food and food preparation is discussed.

Nutrition

Recommendations, Tastes, and Habits. If a survey were taken asking people’s nutritional habits, most would respond that they have healthy diets. How many people do you know that purposely eat unhealthy foods and are proud of it? Not many. Similarly, not many parents deliberately set out to train their children to eat poorly. Yet nutritionists continue to tell us that Americans receive 40% of their calories from fat, instead of the recommended 30%. Few people eat the recommended 30 grams of fiber the body needs daily. Nutritionists broadcast this message continually: “Eat a diet low in fats, especially saturated fat, and high in fiber.” Yet many people do not heed this advice because they were not trained to select the proper foods.

One’s diet is formed by tastes and habituation. People eat what they are accustomed to eating. If you are exposed to a food often enough, you can acquire a taste for it. Because preferences grow from habit, you must gradually allow your taste buds to learn the correct foods to eat.

Calories and Nutrients. In order for your body to function, it must have energy. Calories are the energy units supplied by foods. Some foods are more calorie-dense than others. For instance, a cup of fat contains many more calories than a cup of parsley. If calories were all your body needed, and your system could process 100% of its calories from fat without harm to the body, then the best food choice might be the cup

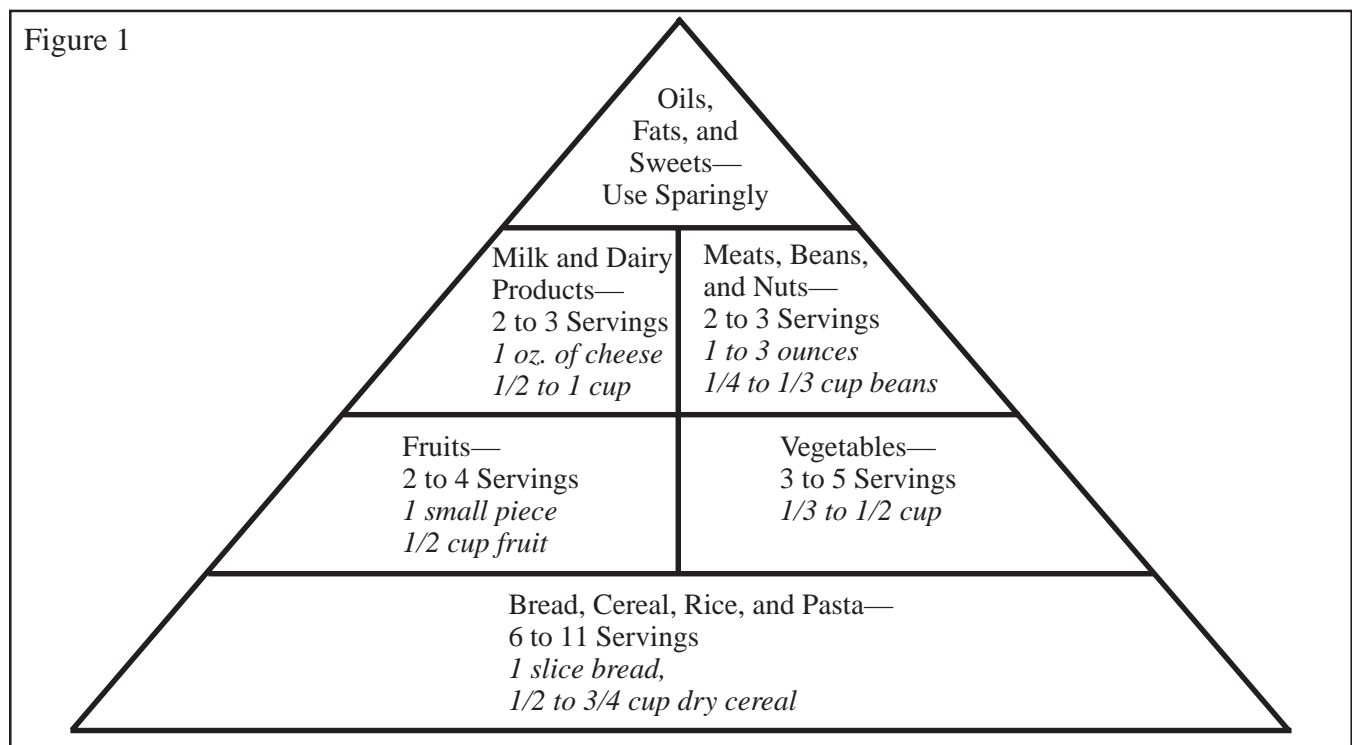
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of fat. However, your body needs many other nutrients to rebuild itself and battle disease. The basic nutrients needed are water, protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and fats from appropriate sources. Since your body needs varied amounts of each nutrient daily, and since foods differ in the amounts and kinds of nutrients they contain, keeping track of nutrient intake can become a complicated task. Fortunately, to simplify the process of eating a well-balanced meal without having to quantify the amounts of nutrients in each food, a grouping of foods with similar benefits to the body was developed.

“Food Guide Pyramid.” In 1992, the U.S.D.A. released the “Food Guide Pyramid” (See Fig. 1). This guide lists the recommended daily servings from the basic food groups and thus eliminates the difficulty in counting grams of nutrients. The base of the pyramid consists of bread, cereal, rice, and pasta, with a recommended 6 to 11 servings a day. Next in the pyramid is the vegetable and fruit group. You should have 3 to 5 servings of vegetables and 2 to 4 servings of fruit daily. After this, whatever calcium, iron and protein needs have not been met by eating from the first groups may be obtained from eating 2 to 3 servings from the meat and milk group. Beans and nuts are included in the meat group because they contain similar nutrients as meat. Beans are much higher in fiber and generally lower in fat than either meat or nuts. At the top of the pyramid are fats, oils, and sweets. These should be used sparingly.

This pyramid is easy to understand and to follow. It underscores the requirements to eat largely from the bread and cereal group and also more from the fruit and vegetable group. Please note, however, that not all vegetables are created equal. Presently, the emphasis is on eating more vegetables high in beta carotene, such as carrots, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes, and those from the cabbage family such as broccoli. These seem to provide some protection against cancer.

A common habit is to begin eating with foods from the top of the pyramid that are calorie dense, quick-fix or hunger foods. When this happens, very few of the base foods, the ones that are high in fiber, low in fat, and packed with vitamins and minerals, are eaten.



Foods that Build, Foods that Deplete. We must stop viewing certain foods as “neutral.” A food either builds or weakens your system. Good, nutrient-rich foods will regenerate cells and the immune system while others will rob the body of needed nutrients. Processed sugar is a culprit. It depletes the body of Vitamin B, zinc, and weakens the immune system while stressing the pancreas and creating an excellent growth medium for bacteria and yeast. Caffeine depletes calcium, Vitamins B and C. Phosphoric acid contained in soft drinks is also a calcium robber. There is evidence that a person’s calcium needs increase with an increased intake of meat. Obviously, whatever is put into your body has an effect for well-being or for ill.

Food allergies are a problem for many people. “Every Body Needs Milk” is a catchy slogan but an incorrect nutritional statement. Milk is a common food allergen. Eliminating milk or dairy products from your diet may relieve ear aches, rashes, or other ailments. Other foods such as corn, wheat, and peanuts also cause allergies. A shift in eating habits, where allergies are concerned, may also relieve a child’s behavior problems such as short attention span and sleeplessness. You can find out more from your library about hidden food allergies, if you suspect certain foods are a possible problem for you or your child.

Listen to Your Body. Many of us need to retrain our nutritional thinking patterns and instruct our children in proper diet plans. You can instruct your children not to heed the latest food craze on television, but to listen to their bodies. You can train them to feel the way their bodies respond after eating certain foods. Ask them, “Are you more energetic or more sluggish?” Which foods give them prolonged energy, rather than a short spurt followed by tiredness? Children can also begin to recognize the signs and symptoms of nutritional deficiencies. Each body is indeed uniquely created in terms of its nutritional requirements.

The “Little House” Diet. Our modern diet is one of excess compared to the foods and eating habits of Laura’s day. We have access to whole, fatty milk, butter, and ice cream. The Ingalls drank skimmed milk if they made butter. The American sugar intake has increased three times what was generally consumed 125 years ago. This remains an alarming statistic when you realize the nutrient depletion occurring.

Laura ate fresh fruit and vegetables grown in nutritionally fertile soil. Our produce today is potentially less nutritious because of overworked land and the expanded time between harvesting and the store shelf. During transport time vitamins in foods lose their potency when exposed to air and light.

Another downfall of the modern diet is, because of ease and advertising, many people have become accustomed to processed, prepared foods. In these foods, not only are naturally occurring fiber, vitamins, and minerals stripped away, but salt, fat, and sugar are added as flavor enhancers. What is eaten may be filling, but our bodies are being nutritionally shortchanged. In Laura’s day, food preparation consumed much of the women’s time. There were no “convenience foods.” Diets were richer in bodybuilding nutrients and naturally better tasting.

Healthy Bodies, Healthy Spirits. The Bible says, “My people perish for lack of knowledge.” This can be true physically and also spiritually. Applying these basic nutritional guidelines to your diet will keep the body alive and increase vitality. The goal of physical maintenance is to be able to do the Lord’s work. As we develop healthy eating habits for ourselves and our children, we have more energy for service and less sickness. Good nutrition can negate diseases such as chronic mild malnutrition and its ailments: diabetes, heart disease, appendicitis, and gallstones. When children are trained in better eating habits and in feeling the results in strengthened bodies, they will be able to do and give more, and they will recognize it as God’s gift in their lives. Because they have been strengthened, they will one day rise up and call us blessed for they will be equipped to carry on the faith for their generation.