

Why Choose Density Over Energy? *Rebecca Morley, MA*

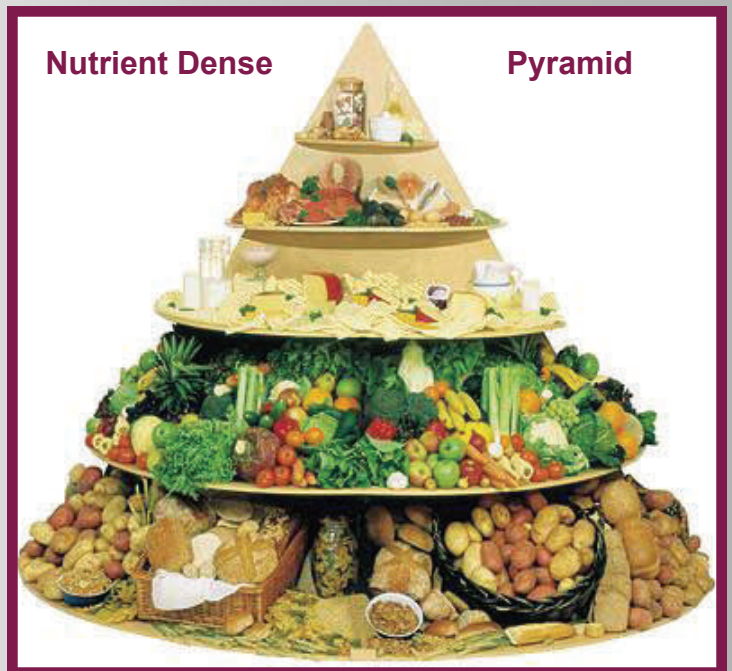
Many of us choose foods based on immediate gratification, comfort, price, and convenience. There's little thought about the long-term health impact of our selections. As we know, what is often chosen are foods that taste good and cost less, yet don't promote health. We end up getting the most calories for the money, rather than the most nutrients. But where do you begin? With the energy content or nutrition density. What's the difference anyway?

***Nutrient density** refers to the amount of nutrients in a given volume of food. Nutrient-dense foods have lots of nutrients, often with fewer calories. Energy-dense foods have more calories for the volume and generally fewer nutrients.

Compare carrots to crackers. Both snacks have about 50 calories, but carrots have more nutrients for the same number of calories. Carrots are nutrient dense; while crackers are energy dense. This is important for people watching their weight. Foods low in calories, but high in fiber, complex carbohydrates and healthy fats will keep us satisfied while limiting calories.

***Brightly colored fruits and vegetables** are nutrient density winners. They are rich in compounds with healthy benefits such as fiber, anti-oxidants, phytochemicals and essential fatty acids. Nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables include carrots, tomatoes, broccoli, kale, spinach, berries, apples, cherries, pomegranate and oranges. They have lots of rich color, fiber, vitamins and minerals.

(*Note: Source articles are hyperlinked)



Nutrient-dense foods from other food groups

include salmon, tuna, trout, low-fat dairy products, oatmeal and whole grains, soy, dry beans and some fortified foods. Choosing foods that promote health is easier if you shop along the store perimeter where produce, fresh lean meats, low-fat dairy and fresh whole-grain bakery goods are found.

Energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods include those with added sugar and fat, refined white flour products, processed lunch meats, most frozen desserts, candy, soda and chips. Think "**junk food**". Cheap and full of calories, these foods promote disease not health.

***Eating nutrient-dense foods** will ensure we get the nutrition we need, without leaving us hungry. To be healthy or unhealthy? The choice is yours.