



POINTS TO PONDER

Discretionary calories

For teachers: These interactive discussion questions are designed to stimulate discussion with students in the classroom. (Discussion may be better suited to older students due to the more abstract nature of this topic).

1. Ask students to define discretionary calories.

- Discretionary calories are the calories you have left over after you have met your nutrient requirements with choices from MyPyramid food groups.

2. Ask students if they know what a budget is.

- Everyone has a calorie budget made up of essential calories and extras (discretionary calories).
- Ask students where essential calories should come from.
- Ask where they get some of their extra calories.
- Each person's budget is different, depending on age, sex, size, physical activity etc.

3. Have students list ways that they could use their discretionary calories.

- Eat more foods from any food group than MyPyramid recommends.
- Eat higher calorie forms of foods (cheese, biscuits, sweetened cereal, foods with added sweeteners or fats).
- Add fats or sweeteners to foods.
- Eat or drink items that are mostly fats, sweeteners, candy, soda pop.etc.

4. Ask students if they think people have to try to get discretionary calories?

- Most people overspend their allowance for discretionary calories, choosing foods higher in fats, sugars, etc. than their budget allows.
- Most discretionary calorie allowances are small (100 to 300 calories), depending on age, gender, and physical activity level.

Fun ways to learn about discretionary calories:

- **Determine your calorie budget.** Use a com-



puter in a classroom, library, or computer lab to have students access their calorie and discretionary calorie budget at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramid/index.aspx>

- Students can also track their food intake with MyPyramid Tracker, accessed at <http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov/>

■ **Budget challenge.** Have each student track their food intake for one day and see if each student can stay within their budget for a day.

How many essentials did they have? How many extras?

- Have a challenge with other classes to see which class can stay most closely within their budget.

■ **Build a calorie budget wall or bulletin board.** Divide a wall or bulletin board into 2 sides. Label one side Essentials and the other Extras. Have students bring in food labels and place labels in the correct column. (Note that some foods will fall in the Essential category but have Extra (discretionary) calories as well). For additional information on classifying foods, see http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/discretionary_calories.html