

2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Did you know that The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are updated every five years and have existed for 35 years? Do you know who reviews and updates these healthy eating guidelines? Answer: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services. Keep reading for more information about these recommendations and why they exist.

Why we need this nutrition advice

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans exist because there is a proven link between diet and the development of diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, among others. Often these illnesses are referred to as chronic diseases as they frequently are long-lasting.

In 1980, the government established the first guidelines for the American diet. These recommendations are based on the latest scientific evidence. They are used to help meet the individual nutrient goals as well as for policy makers to develop public nutrition programs that affect home, work, school, and communities. The guidelines are used as a foundation for the federal government's nutrition assistance programs, such as the National School Lunch Program, as well as other nutrition education and outreach programs.



The newly released Dietary Guidelines, 8th Edition, reveal the progress in scientific knowledge about healthy eating choices and outcomes over a lifetime.

The food-based recommendations are for people aged two years and older. This edition focuses on the variety of what people eat and drink and not so much on individual foods and nutrients. The guidelines concentrate on healthy eating patterns, with the goal of improving individual and population health.

Specific Recommendations

The overall dietary advice does not differ much from previous editions. The Dietary Guidelines provide healthy food choices that are flexible for both individuals and families and take advantage of the variety of foods available.

Below are the specific recommendations*-

- Follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan. Eating patterns are the combination of foods and drinks that a person eats over time
- Focus on variety, nutrient-dense foods (foods that have a lot of nutrients, such as vitamins, and minerals, but relatively few calories) , and amount
- Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fat, and reduce sodium intake
- Shift to healthier food and beverage choices
- Support healthy eating patterns for all, such as in multiple settings nationwide, from home to school to communities.

Healthy eating patterns should be flexible to a person's culture, traditions, taste preferences and budget. Healthy eating patterns need to include the following:

- Fruits, especially whole fruits
- Grains, at least half of which are whole grains
- Vegetables, including red and orange, dark green, legumes (beans and peas), starchy and other vegetables
- Dairy, including fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, cheese, and/or fortified soy beverages
- Protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), soy products, and nuts and seeds

- Oils, such as canola, corn, olive, peanut, safflower, soybean, and sunflower. Oils are also present in nuts, seeds, seafood, olives, and avocados.

Although the core Dietary Guideline message has been the same, the recommendations for some nutrients, such as sodium, fat, cholesterol, as well as added sugar have been tweaked to reflect American eating habits and current research.



Some major changes that Americans should be encouraged to make*

- Less than 2300 milligrams (mg) per day of sodium for people over the age of 14 years and less for those younger. The Nutrition Facts label is a tool to check for sodium of processed foods, such as soups, sauces, pizza and pasta dishes
- Less than 10% of calories per day from added sugars. You can learn more about sugars that are added to foods or beverages when they are processed or prepared at www.choosemyplate.gov
Remember that this does not include the naturally occurring sugars found in fruit and milk.
- Less than 10% of calories per day from saturated fat. You can check for saturated fats on the Nutrition Facts label. Foods that are high in saturated fat include whole milk, butter, meats not labeled lean and tropical oils, such as coconut and palm oil.
- If alcohol is consumed, it should be consumed in moderation--up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men, and only by adults of legal drinking age.

Also, Americans of all ages should meet the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* to aim to achieve and maintain a normal body weight that would promote health and prevent chronic disease.

Just in case you are wondering

If you read the actual 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines, there is additional nutrition information you may find interesting, such as,

- The Key Recommendation from the 2010 Dietary Guidelines to limit dietary cholesterol to 300mg per day is not included in the 2015

edition. Why? More research is needed regarding the relationship between dietary cholesterol and blood cholesterol levels. There is not enough evidence to be able to set a limit on dietary cholesterol.

- Trans fats should be as low as possible by limiting foods that contain man-made sources of trans fat, such as the partially hydrogenated oils in margarines. Natural trans fats are present in small quantities in dairy products, but since these foods are an important source of nutrients, they do not need to be eliminated from the diet.
- Caffeine is not a nutrient, but is a dietary component that functions in the body as a stimulant. Most of the research has been focused on coffee intake. Caffeine, though, can also be found in black and green tea, energy drinks, and caffeinated soda. Moderate coffee intake (400 mg/day of caffeine) is not associated with increased risk of chronic diseases, such as cancer or premature death from heart disease. At this time there is limited and mixed evidence in regards to the health outcomes of drinking energy drinks which have high caffeine content.

The Bottom Line

The Dietary Guidelines can help promote health and reduce chronic disease. All people can align with the Dietary Guidelines while tailoring their eating patterns to their cultural, ethnic, traditional and personal preferences over their lifetime.

Finally one last question, True or False: The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans will expand to include infants and toddlers (from birth to age 2), as well as additional guidance for women who are pregnant. Answer: True!

*Reference: Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020, Eighth Edition, www.DietaryGuidelines.gov.

Need a Dietitian?

Registered Dietitians are here to help you with your nutrition questions. To make an appointment call 412.692.4497 (Oakland location) or 412.623.2421 (Shadyside location).