

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines:

Fruits and Vegetables: Chronic Disease Fighters

Chronic diseases, like heart disease, cancer, stroke, and type 2 diabetes account for 7 out of every 10 deaths in the U.S.

Compared to people who consume a diet with only small amounts of fruits and vegetables, people who eat a healthful diet with generous amounts of fruits and vegetables are likely to have reduced risk of chronic diseases, including stroke and perhaps other cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and cancer in certain sites (oral cavity and pharynx, larynx, lung, esophagus, stomach, and colon-rectum).

Fiber Fights Heart Disease

Diets rich in foods containing fiber, such as fruits and vegetables and whole grains, have been shown to have a number of beneficial effects, including decreased risk of coronary heart disease and improvement in laxation. There is also interest in the potential relationship between diets containing fiber-rich foods and lower risk of type-2 diabetes.

- Key recommendation: Choose fiber rich fruits, vegetables, and whole grains often.
- The recommended dietary fiber intake is 14 grams per 1000 calories consumed.
- The majority of servings from the fruit group should come from whole fruit rather than juice. Increasing the proportion of fruit eaten whole is desirable to increase fiber intake.
- Legumes (dry beans and peas) are especially rich in fiber and should be consumed several times per week.

How does fiber work?

1. Fiber lowers blood triglyceride levels. High triglycerides can damage arteries and increase risk for heart disease.
2. Fiber slows down the absorption of food in the gut resulting in better blood sugar control, which may help prevent diminished blood sugar control and type-2 diabetes.

Bring Down High Blood Pressure with Potassium-Rich Fruits and Vegetables

Diets rich in potassium can lower blood pressure and help blunt the effects of salt on blood pressure. Health authorities recommend increasing intake of fruits and vegetables rich in potassium to lower high blood pressure or keep blood pressure within normal range.

- Many American adults will develop hypertension (high blood pressure) during their lifetime.
- Lifestyle changes can prevent or delay the onset of high blood pressure. These changes include reducing salt intake, increasing potassium intake, losing excess body weight, increasing physical activity, and eating an overall healthful diet.
- Great sources of potassium are sweet potatoes, white potatoes, white beans, winter squash, bananas, spinach, melons (cantaloupe, honeydew), and tomato sauce.
- On average, the higher an individual's salt (sodium chloride) intake, the higher an individual's blood pressure. Nearly all Americans consume substantially more salt than they need. Americans may be consuming more sodium than they think because 75% of sodium is added to processed foods by manufacturers whereas only 5 to 10% comes from salt added while cooking or at the table, and 10% comes from natural salt content of foods.
- The potassium in fruits and vegetables is more readily available for absorption than that from meat, milk, and cereal products.

African Americans Can Reduce Their Blood Pressure With Potassium-Rich Fruits and Vegetables

Because African-Americans commonly have a relatively low intake of potassium and a high prevalence of elevated blood pressure and salt sensitivity, this population subgroup may especially benefit from an increased dietary intake of potassium.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans is a report issued by law every 5 years from the secretaries of Health and Human Services and Agriculture that "shall contain nutritional and dietary information and guidelines for the general public." The recommendations are based on the preponderance of scientific and medical knowledge on food and health current at the time of publication of the committee's report. By law, the Dietary Guidelines form the basis of Federal food, nutrition education, and information programs.