



Diets are Out; Eating Patterns are In

2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*¹ offer nutrition guidance to promote health and prevent chronic disease. It is designed for health care professionals to educate consumers, but the information contained in the *Dietary Guidelines* is important for all Americans. Familiarizing yourself with the new *Dietary Guidelines* will help you make healthy food choices and enhance your overall well-being.

The 2015 *Dietary Guidelines* focuses on healthy eating patterns as a lifelong approach to wellness and weight management instead of dieting, which often results in unhealthy behaviors and can be hard to sustain long-term. There are five guidelines and several supporting recommendations.

Follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan

Eating patterns include everything you eat and drink over time, rather than the individual choices you make for one meal. Patterns are also adaptable. Adjustments can be made to meet your personal, cultural, traditional, and financial needs. Make sure your overall choices support a lifetime of health and well-being by developing a healthy eating pattern that includes:

- Colorful vegetables, including dark green, red, and orange
- Fruits, especially whole fruits
- Grains, at least half of which are whole-grains
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy, dairy products, or fortified alternatives (soy beverages)
- A variety of protein foods, such as seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, beans and peas, nuts, seeds, and soy products
- Oils, such as heart healthy olive or canola oil

Focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount

Food should be your first source of nutrition. Strive to eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods which are loaded with essential vitamins and minerals and dietary fiber to fuel your body. If you suspect that you are in need of additional nutrition beyond what your current eating pattern can provide, consult your health care provider before taking a dietary supplement.



Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats, and reduce sodium intake

Foods and beverages that are high in added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium often contain few nutrients which is why they are referred to as empty calories. Eat fewer sweets, processed foods, and salty snacks as part of your healthy eating pattern. Recommendations include:

- Less than 10 percent of calories per day from added sugars
- Less than 10 percent of calories per day from saturated fats
- Less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day from sodium

Shift to healthier food and beverage choices

If you are like many Americans, your current eating pattern may be low in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, dairy, seafood, and oils, but high in calories, added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. You can develop a healthier eating pattern by making these choices:

- Nutrient-dense snacks instead of high calorie snacks
- Whole fruit instead of fruit products with added sugar
- Whole grains instead of refined grains
- Unsalted snacks instead of snacks with added salt
- Oils instead of solid fats
- No sugar-added beverages instead of beverages with added sugar

Support healthy eating patterns for all

Following the *Dietary Guidelines* and maintaining a healthy eating pattern can be challenging. That's why you need to create supportive environments at home and work. Make sure you surround yourself with family, fellow service members, and friends who encourage you to make healthy lifestyle choices every day.

Additional guidance

In addition to the main guidelines, the 2015 *Dietary Guidelines* offers guidance on the following:

Trans fats

Trans fats can be created when foods are manufactured to transform liquid fats into solid fats. You should avoid trans fats as much as possible by limiting use of margarine and spreads, as well as pre-packaged foods such as cookies, cakes, and frozen pizza.



Alcohol

The calories from alcohol should be accounted for in your healthy eating pattern. If you do consume alcohol, you should drink in moderation. That means up to one drink per day for woman and up to two drinks per day for men.

Cholesterol

Cholesterol comes from two sources: your body and your diet. In contrast to the previous *Dietary Guidelines*, the 2015 *Dietary Guidelines* removed the recommendation to limit dietary cholesterol which is found in animal foods such as eggs, dairy products, and meat. The shift in guidance is due to lack of evidence to support a link between dietary cholesterol consumption and elevated cholesterol levels in the blood. However, the current *Dietary Guidelines* does suggest that a healthy eating pattern includes approximately 100 to 300 mg of dietary cholesterol per day.

Physical activity

The 2015 *Dietary Guidelines* recommends that children and adults meet the age-appropriate *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*.² As an adult, you should engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise each week to reduce the risk of chronic disease and prevent weight gain. If your goal is to lose weight and keep it off, aim for at least 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise each week.

The *Dietary Guidelines* is a framework for developing healthy eating patterns that enhance your well-being and reduce your risk of chronic disease. Talk to your health care provider or registered dietitian about how you can use the 2015 *Dietary Guidelines* to make healthy and nutrient-dense food and beverage choices every day.

The *Dietary Guidelines* is published every five years by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs use the *Dietary Guidelines* to develop food, nutrition, and health-related policies that impact service members, retirees, and their families.

References

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020. 8th Edition. <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>. Published January 2016. Accessed January 2016.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/pdf/paguide.pdf>. Published October 2008. Accessed January 2016.