

DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS 2015-2020 EIGHTH EDITION

For Professionals: Recommendations At-A-Glance

The *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines* provides the information you need to help Americans make healthy food choices. Based on the current body of nutrition science, the *Dietary Guidelines* is a go-to resource for policymakers, public health professionals, and other experts working to improve the health of individuals, families, and communities across the nation.

The current edition is structured around 5 overarching Guidelines. This overview gives busy professionals the essentials—a rundown of each Guideline along with supporting Key Recommendations—to help you apply the Guidelines in practice.

Guideline 1. Follow a Healthy Eating Pattern Across the Lifespan.

The *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines* emphasizes the importance of overall healthy eating patterns. They're important because people don't eat foods and nutrients in isolation. **What really matters is the big picture**—how a person's food and beverage choices add up over their lives.



Key Concept:

Eating pattern. The combination of all the foods and beverages a person eats and drinks over time.

Eating patterns have a significant impact on health. Diet is one of the most powerful tools we have to reduce the onset of disease. Healthy eating patterns can help prevent obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, and Type 2 diabetes. Currently, about half of all American adults have one or more of these diet-related chronic diseases.

Healthy eating patterns are adaptable. When people follow a healthy eating pattern, they can incorporate many of the foods they enjoy. Healthy eating patterns can work for anyone, accommodating their traditions, culture, and budget.

Guideline 2. Focus on Variety, Nutrient Density, & Amount.

The *Dietary Guidelines* gives clear recommendations about how to follow a healthy eating pattern. By definition, healthy eating patterns need to:

- Stay within appropriate calorie limits for a person's age, sex, and activity level
- Meet nutritional needs
- Be achievable and maintainable in the long-term



There are many paths to a healthy eating pattern. The *Dietary Guidelines* provides examples of 3 eating patterns — the Healthy U.S.-Style, Healthy Mediterranean-Style, and Healthy Vegetarian Eating Patterns.

One important way of achieving a healthy eating pattern is to choose a variety of nutrient-dense foods across all food groups.



Key Concept:

Nutrient density. Nutrient-dense foods have the right balance—they pack in plenty of important nutrients and are naturally lean or low in solid fats and have little or no added solid fats, sugars, refined starches, or sodium. Nutrient-dense foods are the foundation of a healthy eating pattern.

Healthy eating patterns include nutrient-dense forms of:

- A variety of vegetables: dark green, red and orange, legumes (beans and peas), starchy, and other vegetables
- Fruits, especially whole fruits
- Grains, at least half of which are whole grains
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and fortified soy beverages
- A variety of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), soy products, and nuts and seeds
- Oils, including those from plants (canola, corn, olive, peanut, safflower, soybean, and sunflower) and oils that are naturally present in foods (nuts, seeds, seafood, olives, and avocados)

Note that these foods are only nutrient dense if they're prepared with little or no added solid fats, sugars, refined starches, and sodium.

Guideline 3. Limit Calories from Added Sugars & Saturated Fats & Reduce Sodium Intake.

The *Dietary Guidelines* also recommends limits on a few specific dietary components.



Added Sugars: Limit to less than 10% of total calories daily.

When sugars or syrups are added to foods as they're processed or prepared, they're called added sugars. (Natural sugars—in fruits, vegetables, and milk—are not added sugars.) Added sugars add calories without other nutritional value. When a person's diet is high in added sugars, it may be hard for them to achieve a healthy eating pattern.

Saturated & *Trans* Fats: Limit saturated fats to less than 10% of total calories daily by replacing them with unsaturated fats and limit *trans* fats to as low as possible.

Diets high in saturated and *trans* fats are associated with heart disease. Foods high in saturated fats include butter, whole milk, and meats that aren't labeled lean. *Trans* fats are in processed foods, like desserts, frozen pizza, and coffee creamer.

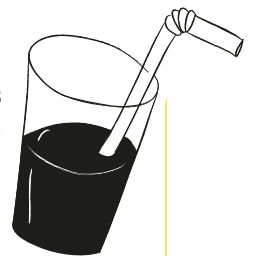
Sodium: Limit to less than 2,300 mg daily (for adults and children 14 years and older).

Most Americans get 50% more sodium than recommended. Diets high in sodium are associated with high blood pressure and heart disease.

Alcohol: Limit to no more than 1 drink daily for women and no more than 2 for men.

The *Dietary Guidelines* doesn't recommend that people start drinking alcohol for any reason and many people shouldn't drink, such as women during pregnancy. But for adults of legal drinking age who already do, moderation is essential.

Almost 50% of all added sugars in the American diet are in drinks—like soft drinks, fruit drinks, and energy drinks.



Guideline 4. Shift to Healthier Food & Beverage Choices.

When it comes to improving food and beverage choices, small changes can add up to big benefits. That's why the *Dietary Guidelines* emphasizes shifts—doable, healthy changes to how people already eat.



Key Concept:

Shifts. A term for healthy substitutions—replacing typical food choices with nutrient-dense alternatives. Healthy shifts can be within food groups or between them.

Making healthy shifts is a great way to add more nutrient-dense foods while eating fewer foods with added sugars, saturated and *trans* fats, and sodium.

Examples include **shifts** from:



Full-fat cheese or whole milk to low-fat cheese or milk



White bread to whole wheat



Fatty cuts of meat to seafood or beans



Butter to olive or canola oil



Soft drinks to water



Potato chips to unsalted nuts

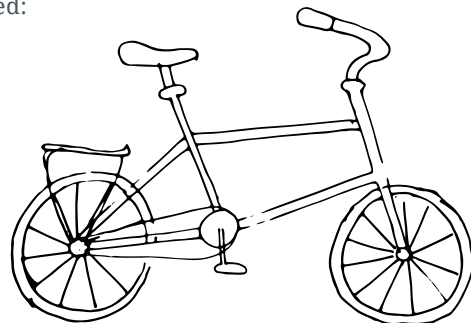
Don't forget physical activity! In addition to the *Dietary Guidelines*, Americans should follow the *Physical Activity Guidelines*.

Adults need:

- At least 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each week
- Muscle-strengthening exercises on 2 or more days each week

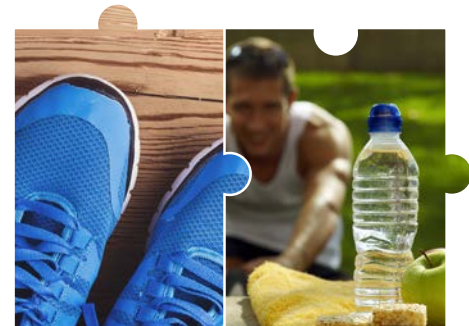
Children age 6 to 17 need:

- At least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, including aerobic, muscle-strengthening, and bone-strengthening activities



The concept of “healthy shifts” makes dietary change tangible and less overwhelming. By helping people focus on small improvements, eating healthy may seem more manageable.

Americans make so many choices every day about what to eat and drink. Help them see each choice as an opportunity to make a small, healthy change.



Guideline 5. Support Healthy Eating Patterns for All.

The vast majority of Americans aren't following the recommendations in the *Dietary Guidelines*. You can help change that.

Professionals can work together—with support from the public—to put the *Dietary Guidelines* into action around the nation.

No matter your field of work or area of expertise, you can help bring about healthy changes:

At Home



Add more veggies to favorite dishes



Plan meals as a family and cook at home



Incorporate physical activity into time with family or friends

In Schools



Support healthier options in the cafeteria



Encourage nutrition education programs or school gardens



Increase physical activity during school

At Work



Add healthier food options in vending machines and during staff functions



Provide health and wellness programs and nutrition counseling



Plan regular activity breaks and walking meetings

In the Community



Start a community garden or farmers' market



Improve healthy food options at shelters and food banks



Create walkable communities by maintaining safe public spaces

The *Dietary Guidelines* can help Americans eat healthier—regardless of zip code, age, sex, or ethnicity.

Take steps to learn even more about the *Dietary Guidelines* and spread the word. Go to health.gov/dietaryguidelines to:

- [Dive into the complete *Dietary Guidelines* document](#)
- [Check out the Toolkit for professionals](#), which has more information and materials you can share with patients or clients
- [Read the Top 10 Things You Need to Know About the 2015-2020 *Dietary Guidelines*](#)
- [Get answers to common questions about the *Dietary Guidelines*](#)