

# Nutrition and Health Info Sheet: Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015 - 2020

For Health Professionals

Produced by:  
Ashley A. Thiede  
Krista Neary, B.S.  
Sheri Zidenberg-Cherr, PhD  
Center for Nutrition in Schools  
Department of Nutrition  
University of California, Davis  
2016

## What is the overall premise of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015 - 2020?

The guidelines suggest that following a healthy eating pattern and participating in regular physical activity can help reduce the risk of chronic disease and maintain health throughout all life stages.

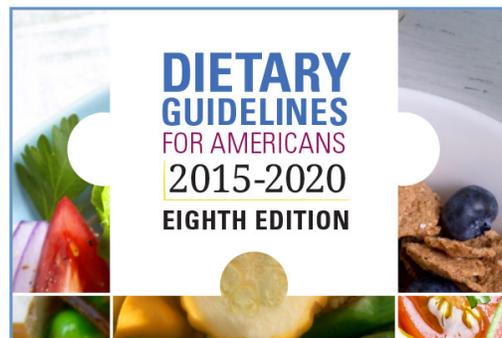


Image source: Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020

## What are the Five Guidelines?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans suggests following five guidelines while simultaneously considering cultural, personal, and traditional preferences.

### Follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan.

In achieving a healthy eating pattern, all food and beverage choices matter; an eating pattern represents the totality of all foods and beverages consumed. Additionally, an individual's nutritional needs should be met primarily from whole foods rather than supplements. In doing so, an eating pattern can be individualized to socio-cultural, personal, and economical preferences.



Photo by: Peggy Greb, USDA ARS

### Focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount of food.

It is recommended to meet needs within calorie limits through the inclusion of a variety of nutrient-dense foods from all food groups in recommended amounts. Nutrient density refers to the ratio of nutrients to caloric contribution of a food.

## Limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats and reduce sodium intake.

Foods and beverages containing added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium in higher amounts should be limited to quantities that fall within the range of a healthy eating pattern.

## Shift to healthier food and beverage choices while considering cultural and personal preferences.

About 75% of Americans are consuming a dietary pattern that is low in vegetables, fruits, dairy, and oils (Figure 1). It is recommended to *shift* eating patterns to include more vegetables, fruits, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products. It is also recommended to *shift* from solid fats such as butter, stick margarine, shortening, lard, and coconut oil to foods naturally containing oils such as nuts and seafood. As depicted in Figure 1, greater than 50% of the United States population is exceeding total grain and total protein foods recommendations without meeting the recommendations for subgroups within these food groups. It is recommended to *shift* to increase the variety of nutrient-dense protein food choices and make half of all grains consumed as whole grains. The majority of the U.S. population, as shown in Figure 1 also exceeds recommendations for added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium intake. Small shifts in food choices accumulated over a meal, day, or week can make a large difference.



Image source: Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020



Figure 1: Dietary intakes compared to recommendations. Percent of the U.S. Population ages 1 year and older who are below, at, or above each dietary goal or limit.

(Image source: Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015-2020)

## Support healthy eating patterns for all.

It imperative that healthy lifestyle choices at home, work, school, and out in the community are easy, accessible, affordable, and normative for all. The food and physical activity choices an individual makes are influenced by the Social-Ecological Model. Improved eating and physical activity behaviors may be sustained by considering the implementation of change at various levels of the Social-Ecological Model.

## What are the key recommendations for following the Five Guidelines?

All foods and beverages within an appropriate calorie level should be accounted for in consuming a healthy eating pattern. Concomitantly, it is advised to promote health and



Photo by: U.S. Department of Agriculture

reduce the risk of chronic disease by attaining and maintaining a healthy body weight by meeting the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* in tandem with the recommendations below.

## What does a healthy eating pattern consist of?

A healthy eating pattern includes a variety of vegetables. In including all fresh, frozen, dried, and canned versions in cooked or raw form, dark greens, red and orange, beans and peas, as well as starchy vegetables should be

included in the diet pattern. Whole fruits, including fresh, canned, frozen, dried, and 100% fruit juice, are essential to a healthy eating pattern. Additionally, half of all grains should be incorporated as whole grains. In order to include the benefits of dairy without excess calories, it is advised to include fat-free or low-fat dairy products in the diet. Sources include yogurt, cheese, milk, and/or fortified soy beverages. A variety of protein sources of both animal and plant origin, utilizing seafood, nuts, seeds, legumes, lean meats and poultry, eggs, and soy products should be included in a healthy eating pattern. Oils should be incorporated throughout. Further, it is advised to consume less than 400mg of caffeine, roughly 4 cups of coffee, per day in order to incorporate moderate caffeine consumption into a healthy eating pattern.

## What does a healthy eating pattern limit?

Saturated fats should be limited to less than 10% of the total daily caloric intake, while the intake of *trans* fats should be as low as possible. It is recommended that added sugars be limited to less than 10% of the total caloric intake per day. It should be noted that although replacing added sugars with artificial sweeteners such as saccharin, aspartame, acesulfame potassium, and sucralose may decrease calorie intake in the short term, further research is needed to confirm their effectiveness as a long term weight management strategy. However, consumption of the aforementioned artificial sweeteners remain safe for the general public based on available scientific research<sup>2</sup>. Sodium should also be consumed in quantities less than 2,300mg/day for adults and children ages 14 years and



Photo by: Peggy Greb, USDA ARS

older; adults with prehypertension and hypertension should limit their intake to less than 1,500mg/day. Additionally, if alcohol is consumed, it should be done so in moderation and only by those adults of legal drinking age. Acceptable limits are set at one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men.

### **What does a healthy eating pattern at the 2,000-calorie level look like?**

Examples of healthy eating patterns at the 2,000-calorie level are provided in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015–2020*, available at <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>. Refer to Table 1 for recommendations regarding specific food groups. The Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern, along with the Healthy Mediterranean-Style and the Healthy Vegetarian Eating Patterns, are three different eating patterns which may be chosen based on proportions and types of foods typically consumed by the American population<sup>1</sup>. These eating patterns were modified to consider nutrient-density and appropriate amounts of food. The Healthy Mediterranean-Style Eating Pattern contains more fruit and seafood and less dairy than that of the Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern. The Healthy Vegetarian Eating Pattern replaces the previous lacto-ovo vegetarian adaptation of the USDA Food Patterns featured in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*. This eating pattern includes more legumes, nuts and seeds, soy products, and whole grains than the Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern. The Healthy Vegetarian Eating Pattern further differs by eliminating meat, poultry, and seafood, but remains identical in all other food groups.

Table 1: Examples of healthy eating patterns at the 2,000 calorie level, adapted from the Dietary Guidelines of Americans, 2015-2020<sup>1</sup>.

<b>Food Group</b>	<b>Healthy U.S-Style Eating Pattern</b>	<b>Healthy Mediterranean-Style Eating Pattern</b>	<b>Healthy Vegetarian Eating Pattern</b>
<b>Vegetables</b>	<b>2 ½ cup equivalent</b>	<b>2 ½ cup equivalent</b>	<b>2 ½ cup equivalent</b>
Dark green vegetables (cup eq. per week)	1 ½	1 ½	1 ½
Red and orange vegetables (cup eq. per week)	5 ½	5 ½	5 ½
Legumes (beans and peas) (cup eq. per week)	1 ½	1 ½	1 ½
Starchy vegetables (cup eq. per week)	5	5	5
Other vegetables (cup eq. per week)	4	4	4
<b>Fruits</b>	<b>2 cup equivalent</b>	<b>2 ½ cup equivalent</b>	<b>2 cup equivalent</b>
<b>Grains</b>	<b>6 oz equivalent</b>	<b>6 oz equivalent</b>	<b>6 ½ oz equivalent</b>
Whole grains (oz-eq. per day)	3	3	3 ½
Refined grains (oz-eq. per day)	3	3	3
<b>Dairy</b>	<b>3 cup equivalent</b>	<b>2 cup equivalent</b>	<b>3 cup equivalent</b>
<b>Protein foods</b>	<b>5 ½ oz equivalent</b>	<b>6 ½ oz equivalent</b>	<b>3 ½ oz equivalent</b>
Seafood (oz-eq. per week)	8	15	0
Meats, poultry, and eggs (oz-eq. per week)	26	26	3 oz-eq./wk eggs
Legumes (beans and peas) (oz-eq. per week)	0	0	6
Nuts, seeds, and soy products (oz-eq. per week)	5	5	8 oz-eq./wk soy 7 oz-eq./wk nuts and seeds
<b>Oils</b>	<b>5 ½ Tsp</b>	<b>5 ½ Tsp</b>	<b>5 ½ Tsp</b>

## References:

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015 – 2020 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. December 2015. Available at <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>.
2. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. *High-Intensity Sweeteners*. N.p., 19 May 2014. Web. 29 Feb. 2016. <http://www.fda.gov/food/ingredientspackaginglabeling/foodadditivesingredients/ucm397716.htm>.

The University of California prohibits discrimination or harassment of any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity, pregnancy (including childbirth, and medical conditions related to pregnancy or childbirth), physical or mental disability, medical condition (cancer-related or genetic characteristics), ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation, citizenship, or service in the uniformed services (as defined by the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994: service in the uniformed services includes membership, application for membership, performance of service, application for service, or obligation for service in the uniformed services) in any of its programs or activities.

University policy also prohibits reprisal or retaliation against any person in any of its programs or activities for making a complaint of discrimination or sexual harassment or for using or participating in the investigation or resolution process of any such complaint.

University policy is intended to be consistent with the provisions of applicable State and Federal laws.

Inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Director, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1111 Franklin Street, 6th Floor, Oakland, CA 94607, (510) 987-0096.

Copyright © The Regents of the University of California, Davis campus, 2016. All rights reserved. Inquiries regarding this publication may be directed to [cns@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cns@ucdavis.edu). The information provided in this publication is intended for general consumer understanding, and is not intended to be used for medical diagnosis or treatment, or to substitute for professional medical advice.