# Steps to a Healthier You: A Summary of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide/MyPyramid

*Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service*

***Mary Meck Higgins, PhD, RD, LD, CDE***

Do you want to feel better today and stay healthy for tomorrow? Then read on. Following just some of the recommendations can have health benefits.

The Dietary Guidelines and the Food Guide/MyPyramid encourage us to make wiser food and beverage choices, to eat fewer calories and to be more physically active. How can you do this? And why are these changes important for health? This publication contains questions and answers (Q and A) that summarize recent dietary advice.

## Q. What are Dietary Guidelines?

**A.** The Dietary Guidelines are designed to enhance the health of people over two years of age who have no chronic health conditions, and to reduce the future risk for many diseases (such as heart disease, certain kinds of cancer, stroke, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis). They are revised every five years by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture.

## Q. What is a healthy diet?

**A.** A healthy diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. It includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, nuts, seeds and small amounts of oils. It is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), added sugars and alcohol. Assistance programs can help people of all ages with limited resources buy groceries for a better diet. To find out more, call toll free 1-800-221-5689.

## Q. How can I make smart choices from every food group?

**A.** Make half your grains whole. Vary your veggies. Focus on fruits. Get calcium-rich foods and beverages. Go lean with protein. Know the limits on fats, salt, added sugars and alcohol. Make these choices throughout the day, even when you eat out and are on the go. For instance, eat whole grains for breakfast. On a long commute or a shopping trip, pack fresh fruit, cut-up vegetables, string cheese sticks or a handful of unsalted nuts. When grabbing lunch, have a sandwich on whole grain bread and a beverage without added sugars, such as low-fat or fat-free milk or water. In a restaurant, choose steamed, grilled or broiled dishes instead of fried foods.

Family & Consumer SCIENCES

Fact Sheet

Family & Consumer SCIENCES

## Look at how – and why – to follow the guidelines.

### Make half your grains whole.

When choosing grains, select whole wheat breads, tortillas and cereals; brown or wild rice; oatmeal and popcorn. To determine if a food is whole grain, look for one of the following phrases or words first on the label's ingredient list: whole wheat, oatmeal, whole oats, bulgur, graham flour, whole grain corn, whole rye, brown rice or wild rice.

Foods may or may not be whole grain products if they are labeled with these words: multigrain, stone ground, 100% wheat, cracked wheat, seven grain or bran. Refined grains are not whole grains. Examples of refined grain products are enriched white flour, enriched white bread, degermed cornmeal and white rice. Refined grains have been milled, which removes the bran and germ, along with dietary fiber, iron and many B vitamins. Milling gives grains a finer texture and an improved shelf life. Most refined grains are enriched, which means that certain nutrients are added back. Fiber is not added back to enriched grains.

Most adults should eat 3 to 4 ounce equivalents of whole grains and 5 to 8 ounce equivalents total of all grains, each day. In general, 1 slice of bread, 1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal or 1/2 cup of cooked rice, cooked pasta or cooked cereal can be considered as 1 ounce equivalent from the grains group. One large bagel or muffin is usually 3 or 4 ounce equivalents of grains.

To control calories and eat more whole grains, substitute a whole grain for a refined grain product. For instance, eat whole wheat bread instead of white bread, or brown rice instead of white rice. Choose grain foods that are low in fats or oils, sodium and added sugars.

Grains, especially whole grains, provide many nutrients vital for health. Grains are important sources of several B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and folic acid), minerals (iron, magnesium and selenium) and dietary fiber.

### Vary your veggies.

Try to have several different kinds of vegetables each day. Vegetables may be raw or cooked; fresh, frozen, canned or dried; and may be whole, cut-up, mashed or juiced. Each week, choose dark green vegetables (such as romaine lettuce, broccoli and spinach), orange vegetables (such as carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin and winter squash), cooked dry beans and peas (such as lentils, split peas or kidney beans), starchy vegetables (such as white potatoes, corn and green peas) and other vegetables (such as tomatoes, green beans, cabbage and onions).

Most adults should eat 2 to 3 cups of vegetables each day. In general, 1 cup of raw or cooked vegetables or vegetable juice, or 2 cups of raw leafy greens can be considered as 1 cup from the vegetable group.

The healthiest choice for canned vegetables has no added salt. Go light on salad dressings and sauces or seasonings, which often add calories, fat and sodium to vegetable dishes. For better health, choose dark green and orange vegetables and cooked dry beans and peas more often. Also select high-potassium vegetables often, such as

continued on page 4

## Q. What is MyPyramid?

**A.** It is a logo to remind consumers to make healthy food choices and to be physically active every day. In 2005 it replaced the Food Guide Pyramid.

It is intended to encourage people in the United States to eat a variety of foods in moderation and in the right proportions plus include physical activity, gradual improvement and dietary personalization.


- Variety is symbolized by six colorful bands, representing grains, vegetables, fruits, oils, milk and calcium-rich foods, and meats and beans. All of these food groups are needed for good health.
- Moderation is represented by the narrowing of each food group from bottom to top. Foods with little or no solid or saturated fats, or added sugars, form the base of a healthy diet and should be selected most of the time. The narrow top stands for foods with added sugars and solid fats. To fit more fats and sugars into your diet without weight gain, increase physical activity.
- Portions, or how much to eat from each group, are suggested by the width of the food group bands. The oils band is narrow, indicating that lesser amounts are needed each day, while more of other foods (such as whole grains, vegetables and fruits) should be eaten. Check the Web site *www.MyPyramid.gov* for how much you need.
- Physical activity each day is represented by the person climbing steps.
- Gradual improvement in diet and physical activity level is encouraged by the slogan, Steps to a Healthier You.
- Personalization. The interactive Web site helps you personalize your diet with information about what and how much to eat for 12 different calorie levels. It provides tips on how to count mixed dishes, how to help children eat healthier, a seven-day sample menu, a poster of your food plan, and a worksheet to help track progress and choose goals. Click on MyPyramid Tracker to get a comparison of your intake with the Dietary Guidelines.

sweet potatoes, white potatoes, tomato products (paste, sauce and juice), beet greens, winter squash, spinach, white beans, soybeans, lima beans, lentils, kidney beans and split peas. Buying fresh vegetables when they are in season costs less, and they are likely to be at their peak flavor, too.

Vegetables are important sources of many nutrients, including potassium, dietary fiber, folic acid and vitamins A, E and C. Most vegetables are naturally low in fat and calories, and none have cholesterol.

### Focus on fruits.

Try to eat a variety of fruit each week. Fruits may be raw or cooked; fresh, canned, frozen or dried; and whole, cut-up, pureed and juiced. Choose fruit with no added sugar most of the time. Select fruits high in potassium often, such as bananas, prunes, prune juice, dried peaches and apricots, cantaloupe and honeydew melon. Keep fruit juices at less than half of your total fruit intake, because juice does not provide the benefits of dietary fiber.

Most adults should eat 1 1/2 to 2 cups of fruit each day. In general, 1 cup of fruit or 100% fruit juice, or 1/2 cup of dried fruit, can be considered as 1 cup from the fruit group. For example, a large orange (about 3 inches in diameter) counts as 1 cup.

Fruits are important sources of many nutrients, including potassium, dietary fiber, vitamin C and folic acid. Most fruits are naturally low in fat, sodium and calories. None have cholesterol.

### Get calcium-rich foods and beverages.

Frequently choose milk as your beverage. Go low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) when you choose milk, yogurt and other milk products. If you usually drink whole milk, try reduced fat (2%) milk, then low-fat (1%) and then make the switch to fat-free (skim).

The guidelines recommend that adults consume 3 cups of milk each day. In general, 1 cup of yogurt, 1 1/2 ounces of natural cheese or 2 ounces of processed cheese can be considered as 1 cup from the milk group. However, one slice of processed cheese or a scoop of ice cream is the calcium equivalent of only 1/3 cup from the milk group, and 1/2 cup cottage cheese is equivalent to just 1/4 cup milk. All fluid milk – and foods made from milk that retain their calcium content such as most hard and soft cheeses, yogurts, puddings and other milk-based desserts – are considered part of this food group. Foods and beverages made from milk that have little to no calcium (such as cream cheese, cream and butter) are not considered part of this group.

Eating a diet rich in milk and milk products provides nutrients including calcium, potassium, vitamin D and protein and can reduce the risk of osteoporosis. Including milk products is especially important to bone health during childhood and adolescence, when bone mass is being built.

If you have lactose intolerance, choose lower-lactose or lactose-free alternatives within the milk group, such as cheese, yogurt or lactose-free milk, or take the enzyme lactase before consuming

milk products. Other calcium-rich food choices include calcium-fortified foods and beverages (such as some soy and rice beverages, fruit juices, tofu, cereals and breads), canned fish (sardines and salmon with bones) and some leafy greens (such as collards, turnip greens, kale and bok choy). The amount of calcium that can be absorbed varies.

### Go lean with protein.

If choosing meat or poultry, start with a low-fat or lean cut (such as 90% lean ground beef). Trim visible fat and skin. Keep it lean by draining fat and baking, broiling, roasting, poaching, boiling, grilling or pan-frying without added fat. Vary your protein routine by frequently substituting fish, nuts, seeds and cooked dry beans and peas for meat, poultry or eggs.

Most adults need 5 to 6 1/2 ounce equivalents daily from this food group. In general, 1 ounce of ready-to-eat meat, poultry or fish, 1/4 cup cooked dry beans or peas, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon peanut butter or 1/2 ounce nuts or seeds are considered as 1 ounce equivalent. For example, half of a small chicken breast counts as 3 ounce equivalents. Cooked dry beans and peas can be counted either as vegetables or as a meat and beans group food, whichever you prefer for the day.

The meat and beans food group supplies protein, B vitamins (niacin, thiamin, riboflavin and B6), vitamin E, iron, zinc and magnesium. Eating fish, nuts and seeds boosts intake of healthy monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fat. Cold-water fish (such as salmon, trout and herring) are high in healthful omega 3 fats. Some nuts and seeds (such as flax and walnuts) are excellent sources of omega 3 fats, while others (such as sunflower seeds, almonds and hazelnuts) are good sources of vitamin E. Cooked dry beans and peas are recommended for everyone – including people who eat meat, poultry and fish regularly – because they contribute many important nutrients, including dietary fiber and folic acid.

## Q. Why should I limit some foods and beverages?

**A.** To reduce the calories you eat while getting adequate nutrition, to help keep blood cholesterol and blood pressure levels healthy, and to reduce risk for heart disease, choose foods and beverages low in saturated and trans fats, cholesterol, added sugars and salt (sodium). Added sugars can increase dental caries (tooth decay). Check the Nutrition Facts label on packaged foods for information on fats, cholesterol and sodium. Check ingredient lists for added sugars.

Limit alcohol consumption to avoid harmful health effects of excess and to reduce calorie intake.

To reduce mercury contamination, women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers and young children should avoid some types of fish and eat types lower in mercury. (See the Web site *www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admehg3.html*).

## Ways to eat some foods in moderation

### Limit solid fats and dietary cholesterol.

Instead of solid fats, choose nuts, seeds and vegetable oils for most of your fat sources. Oils are fats that are liquid at

room temperature. Oils provide many calories, about 120 per tablespoon. To balance total calories eaten while getting enough choices from other food groups, eat oils in small amounts. Most adults need just 5 to 7 teaspoons of oils each day. In general, count 1 ounce of nuts or seeds or 2 tablespoons of peanut butter as 3 or 4 teaspoons of oil. One teaspoon of soft tub or squeeze margarine with no trans fats, or of real mayonnaise, counts as 1 teaspoon of oil, while 1 tablespoon of some salad dressings counts as 1 teaspoon of oil.

Most oils are high in vitamin E and essential fatty acids, and are low in saturated fats. Limit coconut oil and palm kernel oil, which are high in saturated fat.

Fats that are solid at room temperature contain saturated or trans fats, or both. Eat few, if any, solid fats (such as butter, cream cheese, stick margarine, shortening and animal fats) or baked goods made with solid fats. Also eat few, if any, high-fat meats (such as marbled and fatty cuts of beef, pork and lamb); bacon; 75 to 85 percent lean ground beef; and regular sausages (such as pepperoni, hot dogs, bologna and salami). Limit intake of high-fat dairy products, including cream and whole milk, and products made from them such as ice cream and cheeses. Similarly, limit high-cholesterol foods including egg yolks and organ meats such as liver and giblets.

### Limit added sugars.

Added sugars include ingredients such as sugars, syrups, honey, juice concentrates and caloric sweeteners. They do not include naturally-occurring sugars, such as those in milk and fruits. Reduce added sugars by drinking fewer sweetened beverages, such as soft drinks, fruit-flavored drinks (fruitades and fruit punch) and flavored milk. Also choose foods with added sugars less often, including candy, sweet desserts and snacks (such as cakes, cookies and pies), sweetened milk products (such as flavored yogurt, pudding or ice cream) and pre-sweetened cereals.

### Limit salt (sodium) to less than 2,300 mg a day.

Choose and prepare foods and beverages with little or no salt. Packaged products with less than 140 mg sodium per serving may be labeled “low sodium.” Prepare more foods from fresh ingredients to lower sodium intake, because most sodium in the food supply comes from packaged foods.

### Q. What are “discretionary calories”?

**A.** Discretionary calories can be used for nonessential foods, including solid fats, added sugars and alcohol; for foods containing higher amounts of fat and added sugars; or for more food from any food group. Fats and added sugars contribute calories with few, if any, nutrients. A medium order of French fries uses 325 discretionary calories, 20 ounces of regular soda uses 260, a medium glazed doughnut uses 165, an ounce of chocolate uses 150 and 12 ounces of regular beer uses 145. Most adults have a daily discretionary calorie allowance of just 100 to 350 calories. To increase your discretionary calorie allowance, increase physical activity.

**If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation.**
Some people, and all people in certain situations, should not drink any alcohol. Moderate drinking means up to one drink containing alcohol a day for women and up to two drinks for men. One drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1 1/2 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.

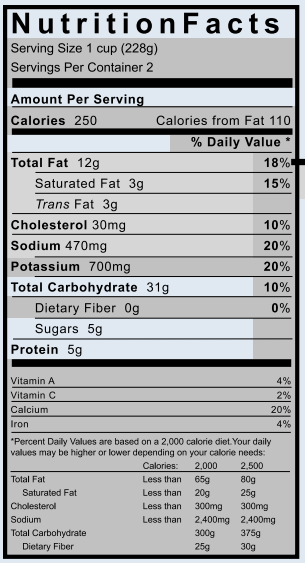
## Q. How do I balance food intake and physical activity?

**A.** Select foods and beverages to stay within your calorie needs. If too many calories are eaten one day, increase physical activity or eat less the next day, or both. As we age, our metabolism slows down. Maintaining energy balance requires moving more and eating less.

Physical activity is movement of the body that uses energy. It helps relieve stress, increases feelings of well-being, helps one achieve and maintain a healthy weight, and lowers risk for chronic disease. The Dietary Guidelines advise adults to get moderate or vigorous physical activity that adds up to 30 minutes or more on most days. For example, briskly push a baby stroller, garden, climb stairs, play soccer or dance. For greater health benefits and to help prevent unhealthy body weight gain, do more vigorous activity, or increase your physical activity to 60 minutes a day. Children and teens should be physically active for 60 minutes on most days. To be counted towards the amount of physical activity that you should strive for, the movement should increase your heart rate. Some physical activities – such as walking at a casual pace or doing light household chores – are not intense enough. To achieve physical fitness, include movement that increases your heart rate, stretching exercises for flexibility, and resistance exercises or calisthenics for muscle strength and endurance.

## Q. How can I get the most nutrition from my calories?

**A.** The most nutritionally rich foods and beverages in each food group are packed with vitamins, minerals and dietary fiber but are lower in calories, saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, added sugars and sodium. To learn more, read the Nutrition Facts label and ingredient lists found on packaged foods and beverages. For extra color, taste and nutrition, buy a variety of nutrient-rich groceries (including whole grains, fruits and vegetables, calcium-rich foods and lean proteins) for meals and snacks that allow you to mix up your choices within each food group. Some foods and beverages don't fit into any food group. These "extras" are often high in fat or sugar, so limit your intake of them to stay within your calorie allowance while meeting your nutrient needs.



Family & Consumer SCIENCES

Adults who need to lose weight should aim for a slow, steady weight loss. Decrease discretionary calories eaten and increase physical activity. Eating 125 fewer calories and using 125 extra calories by doing more physical activity each day will lead to a weight loss of 1/2 pound per week. To help sustain weight loss, do moderately intense physical activity at least 60 to 90 minutes every day.

## Q. How do I keep food safe?

**A.** Prepare, handle and store food safely to avoid foodborne illness. Wash hands and food contact surfaces with hot soapy water. Under clean running water, rub fresh fruits and vegetables briskly with your hands to remove dirt before preparing or eating them.

Do not wash or rinse meat and poultry because of the danger of cross-contamination. Separate raw, cooked and ready-to-eat foods while shopping, preparing and storing foods.

Cook foods to a safe temperature. Do not eat raw or partially cooked eggs or foods containing raw eggs. Similarly, do not eat raw or undercooked meat and poultry. Use a meat thermometer to test for doneness. Avoid consuming fruit juices, raw milk or milk products that have not been pasteurized. Do not eat raw vegetable sprouts, such as bean sprouts.

Thaw food in the refrigerator, in a microwave oven or in an air-tight package under cold running water. Refrigerate or freeze perishable foods – including milk, cheese, eggs, meat, poultry, fish or cooked dry beans and peas, and foods made with them. If a perishable food has been at room temperatures (between 40° and 140° F.) for more than two hours, discard it even though it may look and smell good.

## Feel Better and Stay Heathy

Gradually improve your food choices and physical activity level over time.

## References and Resources:

1. *www.oznet.ksu.edu/humannutrition/dietaryguide.htm* This Web site includes consumer brochures, a slide show, the full report of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and many other resources.

2. *www.MyPyramid.gov* This Web site can help you choose the foods and beverages and amounts that are right for you. It will give you a quick estimate of what and how much you need to eat, based on your age, gender and activity level.

The author thanks reviewer Heli J. Roy, PhD, RD, Associate Professor, School of Human Ecology, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center.



Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, Manhattan, Kansas 66506

MF-2686 AUGUST 2005