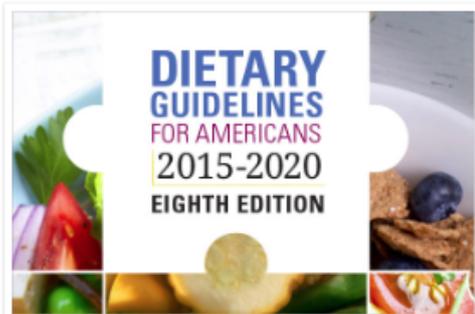


New Dietary Guidelines: The Good, The Bad and The "Meh"



By Ruth Kava — January 8, 2016



[1]Every five years, the Department of Health and Human

Services and the Department of Agriculture are tasked with updating the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and 2015 saw the production of the latest version. This report is not drastically different from the one published in 2010, but there are some differences, some of which make the 2015 version more science-based than the last one.

Unfortunately, some of the changes are not for the best and will serve only to confuse, rather than assist consumer choices. In evaluating the new Dietary Guidelines (DG), it's important to remember that a major use is to set specifications for public food programs, such as SNAP (formerly the Food Stamp Program) and school and military food programs. The report actually specifies that "*The Dietary Guidelines* is designed for professionals to help all individuals ages 2 years and older and their families consume a healthy, nutritionally adequate diet." However, that's not to say that consumers won't use them individually.

Some positive aspects of the DG include:

Aspartame and other intense sweeteners are not demonized: indeed the DG acknowledges that they can be useful in replacing sugars for those who are trying to lose weight at least in the short term.

In accordance with recent scientific data, dietary cholesterol is no longer limited to 300 mgm per day. For most people, the cholesterol in foods isn't the main culprit in raising blood cholesterol to unhealthy levels. The DG no longer sets a specific limit on dietary cholesterol, it just notes that foods high in cholesterol are often also high in saturated fats, which it is advised to control.

Another omission in the new DG is the admonition to eat foods that are "sustainably" produced. This had been suggested by the advisory committee in its preliminary report, but based on many negative comments from the public was not included in the final one.

Caffeine is a new addition to the DG. The 2015 version notes that most caffeine intake in the American diet comes from beverages coffee, tea and soda. Focusing on coffee, the DG states

that, "Moderate coffee consumption (three to five 8-oz cups/day or providing up to 400 mg/day of caffeine) can be incorporated into healthy eating patterns." This is a far cry from scary media reports linking coffee to various types of cancer.

Finally, the 2015 DG advise paying attention to dietary patterns, not simply to individual foods or ingredients (although they seem to ignore that advice in some cases see below). They use the [DASH](#) [2] diet as an example of a diet pattern that has been shown to be healthful.

Some not-so-great recommendations:

For sodium, the new DG is pretty much the same as the 2010 version officials advise an intake of under 2,300 mg sodium per day. They don't note the dissensions about whether or not such sodium restriction is really a positive move for all, as we have [noted](#) [3] previously.

Although not new, the recommendations to keep the intake of saturated and trans-fats and added sugar to less than 10 percent of calories each would be difficult for consumers to address. First, they would have to know their calorie requirement, and then calculate the amount of fats or sugars that would contribute 10 percent of that amount. This is obviously advice for those dealing with menus for groups of people (e.g., school lunch programs).

Overall, the changes to the DG seem to follow the science as we know it today but nutrition is a moving target since research continues into all aspects of what constitutes a healthy diet.

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[2] <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash>

[3] <http://acsh.org/2014/08/new-study-supports-change-dietary-sodium-targets-set-govt-agencies/>