

About the Dietary Guidelines

What are the main themes of the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans provides food-based recommendations for people age 2 and older, including those at risk for chronic disease. Its primary focus is promoting overall health and preventing — rather than treating — chronic disease in the U.S.

The 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines emphasizes the importance of eating patterns as a whole — the combination of foods and drinks that that people consume over time. This edition highlights evidence about the synergistic and potentially cumulative impact of eating patterns on a person’s health and risk of chronic disease.

Another key component of the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines is its comparison of how Americans are eating now against recommendations, providing data by age groups and sex, and clear guidance on shifts in food choices encouraged to achieve healthy eating patterns. Additionally, because many factors influence individual food choices, this edition of the Dietary Guidelines acknowledges that everyone has a role in supporting healthy eating patterns.

The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines contains Key Recommendations that describe healthy eating patterns as well as quantitative recommendations about several dietary components that people should limit. The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines will help people:

- Understand the importance of healthy eating patterns for their health — [see Chapter 1](#)
- Learn how shifts (healthy substitutions in food choices) are an important part of achieving healthy eating patterns — [see Chapter 2](#)
- See that all sectors of society have a role to play in supporting healthy choices — [see Chapter 3](#)

To learn more about the main themes of the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines, read the [Executive Summary](#).

As a health professional, how do I interpret the Guidelines and Key Recommendations in the Dietary Guidelines?

The 5 overarching Guidelines are supported by Key Recommendations that are based on the preponderance of the most current body of scientific evidence. The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines provides details about the evidence supporting Key Recommendations throughout its text and appendices.

To learn more about the evidence that informs Dietary Guidelines recommendations, [read the Introduction](#).

Who developed the Dietary Guidelines?

The federal government — specifically the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Agriculture (USDA) — develops each edition of the Dietary Guidelines. Revisions to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines were informed by the Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee and consideration of Federal agency input and public comments.

Numerous scientists within the Departments consulted on and extensively reviewed the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines throughout its production. Additionally, external, independent peer reviewers ensured technical accuracy in the translation of the science into policy.

To learn more about the process for developing the Dietary Guidelines, [read the Introduction](#).

How is the Dietary Guidelines used?

The Dietary Guidelines is the cornerstone of federal nutrition guidance and is crucial in shaping federal policies and programs related to food, nutrition, and health. While its purpose is to help people eat healthfully and reduce the risk of chronic diet-related disease, the Dietary Guidelines is not written for consumers directly.

Instead, the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines is written for policymakers, nutrition educators, and health professionals. It supports the development of science-based nutrition policy, nutrition education messages, and consumer materials for the general public as well as for specific audiences, such as children, pregnant women, and older Americans.

To learn more about how the Dietary Guidelines is used in public health programs and initiatives, [read the Introduction](#).

How often is the Dietary Guidelines updated?

Every 5 years, HHS and USDA publish the Dietary Guidelines to reflect the current body of scientific evidence on nutrition, food, and health. The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines will be the current policy until the release of the next edition in 2020.

To learn more about the process for developing the Dietary Guidelines, [read the Introduction](#).

What's changed in the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines?

The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines expands upon the 2010 edition's focus on weight management to address the prevention of a broader range of diet-related chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers. While previous editions focused primarily on specific, individual dietary components — such as foods, food groups, and nutrients — the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines takes a wider view. It emphasizes overall eating patterns, the combinations of all the foods and drinks that people consume every day.

To learn more about how the Dietary Guidelines has evolved since previous editions, [read the Executive Summary](#).

How can I access the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines?

The complete 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines is available online. You can read, search, and print the online digital document. You can also look up specific concepts or keywords using the search function.

In 2016, the Dietary Guidelines will also be available in other formats. A downloadable PDF will become available online, and the Government Publishing Office will release a printed edition.

[Read the full 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans digital policy document.](#)

About the 2015 Advisory Committee

Q: How were members of the 2015 Advisory Committee selected?

A: The federal government released a Federal Register announcement in fall 2012 to seek public nominations for Advisory Committee members. The federal government sought expertise in the following specialty areas:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Overweight and obesity
- Osteoporosis
- Cancer
- Pediatrics
- Gerontology
- Maternal/gestational nutrition
- Epidemiology
- General medicine
- Energy balance, which includes physical activity
- Nutrient bioavailability
- Nutrition biochemistry and physiology
- Food processing science, safety, and technology
- Public health
- Nutrition education and behavior change
- Nutrition-related systematic review methodology

Advisory Committee members represented a variety of ethnicities, ages, genders, and regions of the country.

Q: How did the 2015 Advisory Committee review current evidence?

A: The Advisory Committee primarily used the Nutrition Evidence Library (NEL) to support its systematic reviews on nutrition and health. The NEL specializes in conducting systematic reviews to inform federal nutrition policies and programs. It was established by the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion.

The NEL systematic review methodology is designed to objectively review, evaluate, and synthesize research to answer important nutrition- and health-related questions. NEL uses a 6-step approach designed to minimize bias and ensure transparency and reproducibility of the process:

1. Develop research questions
2. Create and implement literature search and sort protocols
3. Develop evidence portfolios (summaries of research findings)
4. Synthesize the bodies of evidence
5. Develop conclusion statements and grade the evidence
6. Describe research recommendations

[Read more about the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee's NEL Systematic Reviews.](#)

Q: Why did the 2015 Advisory Committee use a systematic review methodology?

A: Systematic review is the state-of-the-art method for objectively synthesizing research findings to support practice, guideline, and policy recommendations. The transparent systematic review method used by the USDA Nutrition Evidence Library (NEL) ensures government compliance with the Consolidated Appropriations Act of

2001 (Data Quality Act). The Data Quality Act mandates that federal agencies ensure the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information used to form federal guidance.

Q: Did the 2015 Advisory Committee integrate existing reports into its review?

A: The Advisory Committee reviewed several existing reports to supplement the Advisory Committee's expertise on specific topics. These reports address specific Advisory Committee questions and were drafted by national and international professional organizations and government agencies including:

- American Heart Association (AHA)
- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
- Institute of Medicine (IOM)
- European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
- World Health Organization (WHO)

These reports summarize the most current and comprehensive evidence and have been written by a panel of recognized experts in the field.

Q: Were members of the public able to attend meetings of the 2015 Advisory Committee?

A: The Advisory Committee held a series of public meetings to review and discuss the scientific evidence to support recommendations. All meetings of the Advisory Committee were open to the public online via webcast. The first 2 meetings also allowed attendance in person. Meeting dates, times, locations, and other relevant information were announced via Federal Register notice at least 15 days in advance of each meeting. In addition, meeting materials such as slide presentations were posted on health.gov/dietaryguidelines prior to or following each public meeting.

Q: Were members of the public able to give input to the 2015 Advisory Committee?

A: The public was encouraged to submit written comments throughout the Advisory Committee's deliberations. Federal Register notices provided information on submitting public comments, which were accepted online at health.gov/dietaryguidelines. The public also had an opportunity to provide oral testimony at the second Advisory Committee meeting.

Q: Why were meetings of the 2015 Advisory Committee aired by webcast?

A: Webcasting provides greater accessibility and transparency to individuals nationally and internationally. During the 2010 Committee process, meetings became available by webcast to provide access to a much larger audience of people who could not attend the deliberations in person.