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# Behind Revising the Dietary Guidelines

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What should you eat to be healthy? In 1980, this question was addressed by nutrition scientists in the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (DHHS) in a joint publication "Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans." A second edition of that publication was released in 1985, incorporating recommendations of a nine-member Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee.

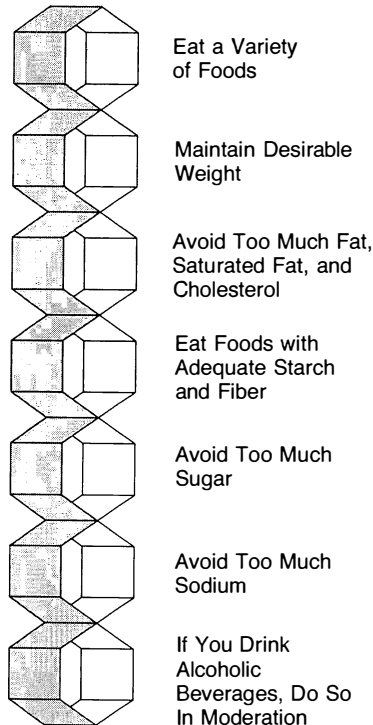
The guidelines in the second edition are similar to those in the 1980 edition in many ways. For example, the new guidelines are for the same audience, namely healthy Americans. The guidelines are especially appropriate for people who have risk factors for chronic diseases such as a family history of obesity, premature heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and high blood cholesterol levels. Like the 1980 edition, the new guidelines do not apply to people who need special diets because of disease or conditions that interfere with normal nutritional requirements. These people may require special instructions from health professionals.

## Looking at the 1980 Guidelines

After extensive review of the scientific literature, hundreds of solicited comments from the public, and discussion at four meetings, the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee suggested retaining the seven guidelines covering the same dietary issues as in the earlier edition. However, the committee changed the wording of two guidelines. "Maintain ideal weight" was changed to "Maintain desirable weight" because the word "ideal" seemed to imply an unduly precise understanding of what people should weigh. "If you drink alcohol..." was changed to the more correct wording, "If you drink alcoholic beverages..." (see figure for all seven guidelines).

Once again, in the new edition the seven guidelines emphasize variety, balance, and

## The 1985 Dietary Guidelines for Americans



Second Edition, 1985  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

moderation in the total diet. The first two guidelines—on variety and weight maintenance—are the framework for a good diet, and the next five guidelines describe special characteristics of a good diet. The importance of integrating all of the guidelines into the diet is also stressed in the new edition. Because they refer to the total diet, the guidelines do not recommend eliminating any food or group of foods from the diet.

As in 1980, the new edition of the guidelines does not recommend specific amounts of vitamins, minerals, fat, sugar, sodium, alcohol, starch, or fiber. And except for nutrients for which there are Recommended Dietary Allowances, members of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee believed that in order to recommend specific

goals they must await further research. However, they did suggest that the U.S. population as a whole choose diets that are reduced in calories (primarily from fats, sugars, and alcohol) and increased in dietary starch and fiber.

Some new cautions have been introduced in the latest edition of the dietary guidelines publication. For example, readers will find recommendations to avoid large-dose supplements of any nutrient, not to attempt to lose weight by inducing vomiting or by using laxatives, and to moderate their use of egg yolks (not eggs). The publication also warns that consuming excess calories, as well as extra saturated fat and high levels of dietary cholesterol, will increase blood cholesterol levels in many people.

The revised guidelines publication also points out that recent research suggests that calcium may play a role in preventing osteoporosis and that, while sodium intake is one of the factors known to affect high blood pressure, several other nutrients may be involved. Obesity plays a major role too. About one in four adults has elevated blood pressure, according to the 1985 edition.

Other examples of information in the revised Dietary Guidelines include: (1) that common table sugar (sucrose) is only one form of sugar, and (2) both sugars and starches appear to increase the risk of tooth decay when eaten between meals, but simple sugars appear to offer a higher risk.

In keeping with the goal of providing guidance for a healthier diet and lifestyle, the 1985 edition also includes advice from the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: Pregnant women should refrain from using alcohol because research has not established the level of consumption at which risks to the unborn occur; and if you drink, don't drive.

## Getting the Word Out

The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee recommended that USDA and DHHS publish and widely distribute the revised guidelines; that these departments use the guidelines as the basis for their nutrition education and information programs; that USDA develop dietary guidance related to

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