On December 29, 2020, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 to the public. While these are considered national “best practice” guidelines, they have not received much attention at a time when the country’s focus is managing the COVID-19 pandemic. This article presents an overview of the guidelines and the important role of healthcare professionals in utilizing this guidance to support a healthy diet.

WHAT ARE THE DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS?

Since the first edition was published in 1980, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans has provided science-based advice on what to eat and drink to promote health, reduce risk of chronic disease, and meet nutrient needs. Publication of the Dietary Guidelines is required under the National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act of 1990, which states that at least every five years, the USDA and HHS must jointly publish a report containing nutritional and dietary information and guidance for the general public. The information in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 is available for use by individuals and organizations that provide nutritional guidance.
healthy dietary patterns for infants and toddlers. 

**OVERVIEW OF 2020-2025 DIETARY GUIDELINES**

The updated Dietary Guidelines provides four overarching guidelines that encourage healthy eating patterns at each stage of life and recognize that individuals will need to make shifts in their food and beverage choices to achieve a healthy pattern. The four guidelines, outlined below, are supported by key recommendations that provide further guidance on healthy eating across the lifespan.

1. **Follow a healthy dietary pattern at every life stage.**
   
   At every life stage—infancy, toddlerhood, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, pregnancy, lactation, and older adulthood—it is never too early or too late to eat healthfully.
   
   • For about the first 6 months of life, exclusively feed infants human milk. Continue to feed infants human milk through at least the first year of life, and longer if desired. Feed infants iron-fortified infant formula during the first year of life when human milk is unavailable. Provide infants with supplemental vitamin D beginning soon after birth.
   
   • At about 6 months, introduce infants to nutrient-dense complementary foods. Introduce infants to potentially allergenic foods along with other complementary foods. Encourage infants and toddlers to consume a variety of foods from all food groups. Include foods rich in iron and zinc, particularly for infants fed human milk.
   
   • From 12 months through older adulthood, follow a healthy dietary pattern across the lifespan to meet nutrient needs, help achieve a healthy body weight, and reduce the risk of chronic disease.

2. **Customize and enjoy nutrient-dense food and beverage choices to reflect personal preferences, cultural traditions, and budgetary considerations.**

   A healthy dietary pattern can benefit all individuals regardless of age, race, or ethnicity, or current health status. The Dietary Guidelines provides a framework intended to be customized to individual needs and preferences, as well as the foodways of the diverse cultures in the United States.

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**Access the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025** and related materials at dietaryguidelines.gov

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3. Focus on meeting food group needs with nutrient-dense foods and beverages, and stay within calorie limits.

An underlying premise of the Dietary Guidelines is that nutritional needs should be met primarily from foods and beverages—specifically, nutrient-dense foods and beverages. Nutrient-dense foods provide vitamins, minerals, and other health-promoting components and have no or little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. A healthy dietary pattern consists of nutrient-dense forms of foods and beverages across all food groups, in recommended amounts, and within calorie limits.

The core elements that make up a healthy dietary pattern include:

- Vegetables of all types—dark green; red and orange; beans, peas, and lentils; starchy; and other vegetables
- Fruits, especially whole fruit
- Grains, at least half of which are whole grain
- Dairy, including fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese, and/or lactose-free versions and fortified soy beverages and yogurt as alternatives
- Protein foods, including lean meats, poultry, and eggs; seafood; beans, peas, and lentils; and nuts, seeds, and soy products
- Oils, including vegetable oils and oils in food, such as seafood and nuts

4. Limit foods and beverages higher in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium, and limit alcoholic beverages.

At every life stage, meeting food group recommendations—even with nutrient-dense choices—requires most of a person’s daily calorie needs and sodium limits. A healthy dietary pattern does not allow much room for extra added sugars, saturated fat, or sodium—or for alcoholic beverages. A small amount of added sugars, saturated fat, or sodium can be added to nutrient-dense foods and beverages to help meet food group recommendations, but foods and beverages high in these components should be limited.

Items to limit include:

- Added sugars—Less than 10 percent of calories per day starting at age 2. Avoid foods and beverages with added sugars for those younger than age 2.

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• Saturated fat—Less than 10 percent of calories per day starting at age 2.
• Sodium—Less than 2,300 milligrams per day, and even less for children younger than age 14.
• Alcoholic beverages—Adults of legal drinking age can choose not to drink, or to drink in moderation by limiting intake to 2 drinks or less in a day for men and 1 drink or less in a day for women, when alcohol is consumed. Drinking less is better for health than drinking more. There are some adults who should not drink alcohol, such as women who are pregnant.

THE ROLE OF HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Healthcare professionals are expected to support and adhere to “best practice” and “evidence-based” guidelines such as the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 in their practice settings. These guidelines include the recognition that diet-related chronic diseases—such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and some types of cancer—are very prevalent among Americans and pose a major public health problem. Today, more than half of adults have one or more diet-related chronic diseases, so while these guidelines are not considered medical nutritional therapy, they should be incorporated in the overall planning and implementation of interventions used in prevention and management of chronic disease.

Using the guidelines in menu development is another key area to consider in overall meal pattern plans and recipes. In the post-acute care setting, state and federal regulatory guidance addresses use of nationally-established menu guidelines.

One regulatory example is found in the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) State Operations Manual Appendix PP—Guidance to Surveyors for Long Term Care Facilities (Rev. 173, 11-22-17). Included in Tag F800 and F803 under the Food and Nutrition Services regulation is that the facility must provide each resident with a nourishing, palatable, well-balanced diet that meets his or her daily nutritional and special dietary needs, taking into consideration the preferences of each resident.

Menus must meet the nutritional needs of residents in accordance with established national guidelines; be prepared in advance; be followed; and reflect, based on a facility’s reasonable efforts, the religious, cultural, and ethnic needs of the resident population, as well as input received from residents and resident groups.

CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 publication (164-page document) along with additional materials, consumer resources, and downloadable graphics are available online at dietaryguidelines.gov. The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have issued an important call to action for healthcare professionals to help the public “make every bite count with the Dietary Guidelines.”

These newly-released guidelines should be considered in all aspects of food, nutrition, and dining. We as foodservice professionals need to help people make food and beverage choices that are rich in nutrition—individual choices that can become a healthy routine over time.
CE Questions: Nutrition Connection

This Level I article assumes that the reader has entry level knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a foundation of basic concepts of the subject matter.

Reading Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 Provides Nationally-Established Nutrition Guidance and successfully completing these questions online has been approved for 1 hour of continuing education for CDM, CFPPs. CE credit is available ONLINE ONLY. To earn 1 GEN CE hour, access the online CE quiz in the ANFP Marketplace. Visit www.ANFPonline.org/market and select “Edge CE Articles” within the Publications Section. If you don’t see your article title on the first page, then search the title, “Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 Provides Nationally-Established Nutrition Guidance.” Once on the article title page, purchase the article and complete the CE quiz.

1. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans is required every ___ years under the National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act of 1990.
   A. 2
   B. 5
   C. 10

2. The information in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans is used to:
   A. Develop, implement, and evaluate Federal food, nutrition, and health policies and programs
   B. Determine the nutrient requirements for Americans
   C. Plan all national subsidies and budgets for food programs in America

   A. Diversity, geographic
   B. Patterns, lifespan
   C. Availability, multi-disciplinary

4. A combination of foods and beverages that constitutes an individual’s complete dietary intake over time is referred to as a/an _____ pattern.
   A. Intake
   B. Nutrient
   C. Dietary

5. Foods and beverages providing vitamins, minerals, and other health-promoting components having little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium are referred to as _____-dense.
   A. Nutrient
   B. Dietary
   C. Intake

6. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 provides four overarching _____ that encourage healthy eating patterns at each stage of life supported by key _____.
   A. Guidelines, recommendations
   B. Studies, findings
   C. Groups, nutrients

7. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 is considered to be:
   A. National regulatory requirements
   B. National established menu patterns
   C. Federal and state mandated programs

Healthcare professionals are expected to support and adhere to “best practice” and “evidence-based” guidelines such as the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025 in their practice settings.