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# Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025

Provides Nationally-Established Nutrition Guidance

NUTRITION CONNECTION



How to use the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025* to support a healthy eating plan

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*

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**Access the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*** and related materials at [dietaryguidelines.gov](http://dietaryguidelines.gov)



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*Guidelines* is used to develop, implement, and evaluate Federal food, nutrition, and health policies and programs.

A fundamental premise of the 2020-2025 *Dietary Guidelines* is that just about everyone, no matter their health status, can benefit from shifting food and beverage choices to better support healthy dietary patterns. The second premise is its focus on dietary patterns. Researchers and public health experts understand that nutrients and foods are not consumed in isolation. Rather, people consume them in various combinations over time—a dietary pattern—and these foods and beverages act synergistically to affect health. The 2020-2025 *Dietary Guidelines* carries forward from the 2015-20 version on the importance of a healthy dietary pattern as a whole. The third is its focus on a lifespan approach. This edition of the *Dietary Guidelines* highlights the importance of encouraging healthy dietary patterns at every life stage from infancy through older adulthood. It provides recommendations for healthy dietary patterns by life stage, identifying needs specific to each stage and considering healthy dietary pattern characteristics that should be carried forward into the next stage of life. For the first time since the 1985 edition, the *Dietary Guidelines, 2020-2025* includes recommendations for

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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### 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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## ESSENTIAL TERMS

Several terms and phrases used throughout the *Dietary Guidelines* are essential to understand. Here are two key definitions:

**Dietary pattern:** This is the combination of foods and beverages that constitutes an individual's complete dietary intake over time. This may be a description of a customary way of eating or a description of a combination of foods recommended for consumption.

**Nutrient-dense:** Nutrient-dense foods and beverages provide vitamins, minerals, and other health-promoting components and have little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seafood, eggs, beans, peas, and lentils, unsalted nuts and seeds, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, and lean meats and poultry—when prepared with no or little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium—are nutrient-dense foods.

- 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](https://www.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. **E**



# CE Questions: Nutrition Connection



This Level 1 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](http://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
3. The 2020-2025 *Dietary Guidelines* focuses on dietary \_\_\_\_\_ using a \_\_\_\_\_ approach.
  - 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

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