

Federal dietary guidelines emphasize healthy eating habits but fall short on added sugars

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The American Heart Association, the world's leading voluntary organization focused on heart and brain health, responded to the [2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) (DGA) released today by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS).

"The new federal [dietary guidelines](#) emphasize the importance of healthy eating and encourage Americans to 'make every bite count,'" said Mitchell S. V. Elkind, M.D., MS, FAHA, FAAN, president of the American Heart Association. "We are pleased that for the first time, the guidelines provide recommendations for pregnant and breastfeeding women as well as infants and toddlers, underscoring the importance of maternal health and [proper nutrition](#) across the lifespan."

The new guidelines, like earlier versions, stress the importance of adopting a healthy dietary pattern that is rich in fruits, vegetables and legumes and includes whole grains, low-or non-fat dairy, seafood, nuts and unsaturated vegetable oils, and low in consumption of red and processed meats, sugar-sweetened foods and beverages and refined grains. The guidelines are consistent with the American Heart Association's dietary recommendations, and they show that a high-quality diet at every life stage can promote health and reduce the risk of diet-related chronic disease.

"But we are disappointed that USDA and HHS did not accept all of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee's science-based

recommendations in the final guidelines for 2020, including the recommendation to lower added sugars consumption to less than 6% of calories," Elkind said.

Added sugars can include refined fruit juices, corn syrup and other added refined sugars. The largest single source of added sugars in the US diet is [sugary drinks](#), which contain excessive calories and no additional nutrients, and contribute to weight gain and diabetes. Many adults and children have little room in their diet for empty calories and need to go lower than 10% to have a healthy dietary pattern and meet their essential nutrient needs.

"It is important to recognize that these guidelines are just a first step," Elkind said. "We need policy and environmental changes to ensure consumers can easily access healthier food. This requires collaboration among the [food](#) industry, government agencies, health organizations and consumers nationwide. Our hope is the Biden administration will prioritize nutrition and all nutrition-related policies will reflect these new recommendations. It is important that these new guidelines are integrated in future school meal policies and regulations, to ensure the [health](#) and well-being of our children."

The guidelines also recommend reducing saturated [fat intake](#) and replacing it with [unsaturated fats](#), particularly polyunsaturated fats. A lower intake of saturated fat and a higher intake of unsaturated fat can lower incidence of cardiovascular disease for individuals. Additionally, lowering saturated fat intake is likely to result in a lower intake of dietary cholesterol, since cholesterol is commonly found in animal foods that are high in saturated fat or consumed with foods high in saturated fat.

Sodium is another key area of interest to the American Heart Association. Reducing excessive sodium intake, of which 70 percent

comes from processed, prepackaged and restaurant foods, is critical to reducing cardiovascular disease risk.

Provided by American Heart Association

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