

# Preliminary report on dietary guidelines emphasizes need for healthy eating habits

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The American Heart Association, the world's leading voluntary organization focused on heart and brain health, praised new recommendations issued this week for the next update of federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The report, released by the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC), will inform the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Agriculture (USDA) as they craft the new guidelines, due out later this year.

The advisory committee's report, written by a panel of nutrition experts, stresses the importance of a healthy diet that includes fruits and vegetables, legumes, whole grains, low- or non-fat dairy, seafood, nuts and unsaturated vegetable oils, and low consumption of red and processed meats, sugar-sweetened foods and beverages and refined grains. This recommended dietary pattern is aligned with the diet [recommendation](#) in last year's Guideline on the Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease from the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association.

"A [healthy diet](#) is one of the best ways to prevent cardiovascular disease and improve overall health, and this report reinforces the need for everyone in America to practice healthy eating habits," said Mitchell S. V. Elkind, M.D., MS, FAHA, FAAN, president of the American Heart Association. "The advisory committee recommends that Americans consume even fewer added sugars than it did five years ago—a significant change. This update, paired with other recommendations in the committee's report, will help steer the public toward a more heart-healthy path in their daily diets."

The Dietary Guidelines issued in 2015 recommended that less than 10% of total calories come from added sugars, and the new recommendation lowers that to less than 6%. 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.

For the first time, the report also provides recommendations for pregnant and breastfeeding women as well as infants and toddlers up to 24 months, a critical time in development. This is a valuable addition to the advisory committee's recommendations and ensures that the Dietary Guidelines will now cover the full lifespan. As the report highlights, nutrition needs vary by life stage and eating habits at each stage can influence future

[food](#) choices and affect health and wellness later in life. Provided by American Heart Association

"We commend the committee for its work to provide a strong, science-based foundation for the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and we encourage USDA and HHS to adopt the recommendations. We will strongly oppose any efforts to weaken these recommendations," said Dr. Elkind. "It is important to recognize that these recommendations are just a first step. 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."

The committee's report maintains the current limit on saturated fats and encourages replacing them with unsaturated fats, particularly polyunsaturated fats. The American Heart Association supports this recommendation. Studies show that a lower intake of saturated fat and a higher intake of unsaturated fat, particularly polyunsaturated fat, is associated with lower incidence of cardiovascular disease. Lowering saturated fat intake also 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. While the committee did not comment on sodium due to the recent review by the National Academy of Sciences, the Association encourages HHS and USDA to continue emphasizing the need to reduce sodium intake in the Dietary Guidelines and incorporate the new dietary reference intakes. Reducing excessive sodium intake, of which 70 percent comes from processed, prepackaged and restaurant foods, is critical to reducing cardiovascular disease risk.

**More information:** Scientific Report of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee:  
[www.dietaryguidelines.gov/2020...ory-committee-report](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/2020...ory-committee-report)

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