

## **PART B. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Since it was first published in 1980, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* has provided science-based advice to promote health, reduce risk of diet-related chronic diseases, and meet nutrient needs. Early editions focused on healthy members of the general public but, recognizing the growing prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and some forms of cancer, more recent editions have covered individuals with increased risk of chronic disease as well.

By law (Public Law 101-445, Title III, 7 U.S.C. 5301 et seq.) the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* is published by the Federal government every 5 years. Since the 1985 edition, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) have fulfilled this requirement by establishing a Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee of nationally recognized experts in the field of nutrition and health to review the scientific and medical knowledge current at the time. The 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee was established for the single, time-limited task of examining the evidence on specific nutrition and public health topics and scientific questions and of providing independent, science-based advice and recommendations to the Federal government. This report presents the Committee's advice to the Secretaries of Agriculture and of Health and Human Services for use as USDA and HHS develop the *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

### **THE ROLE OF DIET IN HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION**

In the United States, more than half of all adults have one or more preventable chronic diseases, many of which are related to unhealthy dietary intakes. Unhealthy dietary intakes, tobacco use, and not enough physical activity, among other risk factors, are related to the leading causes of deaths in the United States.

Up-to-date nutrition advice in the Dietary Guidelines can help improve the health of Americans by encouraging food and beverage choices that are affordable, enjoyable, promote health, and help prevent chronic disease, taking into account that availability and access to nutritious food is important for all Americans, including those who are food insecure. Data from 2018 show that food insecurity and lack of access to affordable healthy food affect more than 37 million people, including 6 million children,

## AN EVOLVING FOCUS FOR DIETARY GUIDANCE

The Federal government has provided dietary advice for the public for more than 100 years. The earliest focus of dietary guidance was on food groups in a healthy diet, food safety, food storage, and ensuring that people got enough vitamins and minerals to prevent deficiency diseases. As nutrition science evolved, researchers learned that diet also played a role in disease prevention and health promotion, and dietary guidance also evolved to reflect the rapidly growing knowledge base about the relationships between diet and health.

Since 1980, the Dietary Guidelines, and the science on which they have been based, have been remarkably consistent on the majority of components that make up a healthy diet, but they also have evolved in several substantial ways.

### Expanding to New Populations

Historically, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* focused on nutrition and food-based recommendations for health promotion and disease prevention for individuals ages 2 years and older. Over the years, however, a growing body of evidence made it increasingly clear that proper nutrition during the earliest stages of life was critical to support healthy growth and development during childhood and help promote health and prevent chronic disease through adulthood, that is, across the lifespan.

In 2012, the USDA and HHS initiated a multi-phase project to generate information that could help the Departments develop dietary recommendations for infants and toddlers.<sup>1</sup> The first phase was completed in 2012-2013. In February 2014, Congress passed the Agricultural Act of 2014, which mandated that, beginning with the 2020-2025 edition, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* expand to include dietary guidance for infants and toddlers (from birth to age 24 months) as well as women who are pregnant. As a result, USDA and HHS adjusted the purpose, timeline, and scope of the project to reflect the addition of pregnant women. The project was tasked with conducting comprehensive systematic reviews on diet and health that are of public health importance for women who are pregnant and infants and toddlers from birth to 24 months of age.

The 2020 Committee has used the evidence generated from this project, in addition to conducting its own systematic reviews, as the foundation for its advice to USDA and HHS on components of a healthy diet for women who are pregnant or lactating and infants and toddlers from birth to age 24 months. USDA and HHS will use this evidence to include, for the first time

in recent editions, dietary guidance for these populations in the *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

## **Evolving from Nutrients to Dietary Patterns**

Previous Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committees focused on evidence that looked at the relationships between individual nutrients, foods, and food groups and health outcomes. Although this science base continues to be substantial, researchers and public health experts began to consider a broader perspective. Science was acknowledging that just as nutrients are not consumed in isolation, foods and beverages are not consumed separately either. Rather, they are consumed in various combinations over time—a dietary pattern.

The evolving evidence showed that components of a dietary pattern could have interactive, synergistic, and potentially cumulative relationships, such that they could predict overall health status and disease risk more fully than could individual foods or nutrients. The 2010 Committee acknowledged the importance of dietary patterns and recommended additional research in this area. The 2015 Committee made dietary patterns a central focus of its evidence review and concluded that a healthy diet could be attained with many dietary patterns adaptable to personal and cultural preferences.

The 2020 Committee continues this same focus with an even deeper examination of the relationships between dietary patterns and specific health outcomes. Future Committees will continue to address the evolving public health concerns and nutrition needs of the U.S. public by examining the latest body of nutrition science.

## **FROM THE 2020 DIETARY GUIDELINES ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT TO THE *DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS***

A major goal of the 2020 Committee is to summarize and synthesize the evidence to support USDA and HHS in developing the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*—the nutrition recommendations for reducing the risk of chronic disease while meeting nutrient requirements and promoting health for all Americans.

The U.S. Government uses the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* as the basis of its food assistance programs, nutrition education efforts, and decisions about national health objectives. For example, the National School Lunch Program and the Elderly Nutrition Program incorporate the Dietary Guidelines in menu planning, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) applies the Dietary Guidelines in its program and educational materials, and the *Healthy People* objectives for the Nation include objectives based on the Dietary Guidelines.

The Dietary Guidelines also provides a critical framework for state and local health promotion and disease prevention initiatives. In addition, it provides foundational evidence-based nutrition guidance for use by individuals and those who serve them in public and private settings, including health professionals, public health and social service agencies, health care and educational institutions, researchers, and business. The Committee also hopes that the *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* will encourage the food industry to grow, manufacture, and sell foods and beverages that promote health and contribute to the U.S. population consuming the appropriate level of calories while meeting recommendations for food groups, nutrients, and other dietary components.

## **A GUIDE TO THE 2020 COMMITTEE'S REPORT**

This Report contains several major sections. Part A provides an Executive Summary to the Report. Part B sets the stage for the Report through this Introduction. A second chapter in this section provides an integration of major findings.

Part C describes the methodology the Committee used to conduct its work and review the evidence on diet and health. Part D: Evidence on Diet and Health provides the results of the Committee's review of the evidence, presented in 14 chapters. Part E: Future Directions includes the Committee's recommendations on topics for possible consideration by the nutrition and public health community, including its research recommendations.

The Report concludes with a number of Appendices, including a glossary; a summary of the process used to collect public comments; biographical sketches of Committee members; a list of Subcommittee and Working Group members; and Acknowledgments.

## **REFERENCES**

1. Stoody EE, Spahn JM, Casavale KO. The Pregnancy and Birth to 24 Months Project: a series of systematic reviews on diet and health. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 019;109(Suppl\_7):685s-697s. doi:10.1093/ajcn/nqy372.