



# Nutrition: Your Prescription for Health

**W**e as patients often assume that a prescription for health involves taking medicines. The drugs that FDA approves are essential for treating disease, but perhaps the most important prescription to prevent many diseases is the food we eat.

My Take is that our food not only needs to be safe to protect our health – but also nutritious, in order to promote our health. The FDA's core mission is to do both, and the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition and other components of FDA, like our Division of Personalized Nutrition and Medicine at NCTR, are hard at work in researching and developing new frontiers in the field of nutrition.

Proper nutrition is an old concept so why do we still have problems with our diet? The answer is complex. But – just like prescriptions for medicine – nutrition must become

more personalized because people are different. When I was growing up I could not understand why my brother could eat so much more than I did, and yet he was so much thinner. He obviously metabolized food differently. Because of advancements in science, technology and medicine, we now know that our genes and how they function make us all unique, and we need to factor that understanding into recognizing that our nutritional needs are unique.

In the past, public health recommendations looked like a “one size fits all” approach to nutrition, breaking food down into groups that every school child could easily identify – and we made very good – but very broad - recommendations about what we should eat – like fruits and vegetables. But today we are breaking new frontiers in nutrition and eating behavior. One example is we are beginning to understand the benefits of nutrition at the genetic level. For example, we have identified 50 genes associated with how the human body processes meat and the changes in

genes metabolizing starch. In the future, we will understand your individual needs for such things as vitamins. And if you know your genetic make up and how your body metabolizes different food groups, you will be able to learn how specific nutritional choices you make will affect your health.

As researchers unravel the science, FDA will speed the pathway and apply cutting-edge discoveries in nutrition as quickly as possible, whether it's in the field of dietary supplements, micronutrients, or our approach to the food label ([www.cfsan.fda.gov/label.html](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/label.html)) we put on the items you purchase. I hope you will visit the website for FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition on a regular basis, as well as the USDA web site: [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov), to get the latest on how food can be your prescription for health.

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Andrew C. von Eschenbach, M.D.  
Commissioner of Food and Drugs

## About Andy's Take

Through this communications column on the FDA Web site, Commissioner of Food and Drugs Andrew C. von Eschenbach, M.D., will discuss weekly FDA issues of interest to the American consumer and occasionally preview upcoming FDA issues and events.



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