

Chapter 4. The President's Recommendations for Improving Nutrition

Eat a Nutritious Diet

Background

Eating right is vital to promoting health and reducing the risk for death or disability due to chronic diseases such as heart disease, certain cancers, diabetes, stroke, and osteoporosis. In fact, it has been estimated that dietary changes could reduce cancer deaths in the United States by as much as 35 percent.

Nevertheless, a large gap remains between recommended dietary patterns and what Americans actually eat. Very few Americans meet the majority of recommendations of the Food Guide Pyramid or the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Only 3 percent of all individuals meet four of the five recommendations for the intake of grains, fruits, vegetables, milk products, and meat and bean food groups. Only one-fourth of U.S. adults eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Unfortunately, poor eating habits are usually established during childhood. And more than 60 percent of young people eat too much fat, and less than 20 percent eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables.

The Food Guide Pyramid is an outline of what to eat each day, and it calls for a variety of food and nutrients. Fruits and vegetables provide essential vitamins and minerals, fiber, and other substances that are associated with good health. Low fat diets rich in fiber-containing grain products, fruits, and vegetables may reduce the risk of heart disease and some types of cancer. Milk products provide protein, vitamins and minerals and are the best source of calcium. However, fats, oils, and sweets provide calories and little else, and should be used sparingly. Drinking enough water is also essential to keeping hydrated, converting food into energy, carrying nutrients through the body, and removing waste.

The President's Challenge:

Americans can dramatically improve their overall health by making modest improvements to their diets. All Americans can benefit from reducing their fat intake and by working more fruits and vegetables into their daily meals. Every little bit of effort counts:

- ***Eat at least five fruits and vegetables every day.*** A large number of research studies have shown that higher intakes of fruits and vegetables are related to decreased risk for cardiovascular disease as well as a lower incidence of certain cancers, including lung cancer, cancers of the mouth and pharynx, squamous esophageal cancer, laryngeal cancer, and some colon cancers.
- ***Follow the Food Guide Pyramid and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans in your food choices.*** Use fruits, vegetables, and grains as the foundation of your meals, and limit your intake of fat and sugar. Foods in one group cannot replace another, nor is one group more

important than another. Research studies examining American diets have documented that people who choose foods from all of the Food Guide Pyramid are not only improving their nutrition, but are better able to maintain a healthy weight.

- ***If you are a parent, set good habits for your family by choosing and preparing food in a sensible way.*** When you shop for groceries, read labels and make wise choices for your family. Prepare foods using as little salt, oil, cholesterol, and fat as possible. Reducing blood cholesterol levels by dietary means has been shown to be effective in decreasing the risk for coronary heart disease. In addition, one study found that reducing saturated fat intake produced a trend towards a decrease in both coronary mortality (21 percent) and total mortality (6 percent).
- ***Eat sensible and moderate portions.*** You can keep your weight in a healthy range by not overeating and balancing what you eat with the energy you expend. Compare the recommended serving size and portions of the food you prepare with what you actually eat. Be sure to eat appropriate servings to ensure proper vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, and proteins are included in your diet.

Promoting Improved Nutrition: Administration Actions

Enhancing the National 5 A Day for Better Health Program--The Administration is strengthening this program by launching a more coordinated effort between the USDA, CDC, and the National Cancer Institute. The expertise of the science and medical communities will lend valuable support for improving overall nutrition and increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables in the United States to five-to-nine servings every day. The program seeks to inform Americans that eating fruits and vegetables can improve their health and reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer, the two leading causes of death in the United States.

Promotion of Nutrition Curriculum and Education--The Department of Education (ED), USDA, and HHS are collaborating on a new MOU concerning the promotion of nutritional excellence in school. Just as USDA and HHS assist in the operation of the school lunch programs, these Departments will also provide guidance on good nutrition that can be incorporated into daily classes and lessons on health. Based on a successful program in elementary schools, this joint effort will be expanded to higher grades. The information will help students identify how a healthy meal is planned by using the school lunch as an example and will highlight examples of healthy lunches brought from home.

Eat Smart-Play Hard Campaign--This national nutrition education and promotion campaign is designed by the USDA to convey science-based, behavior-focused, and motivational messages about healthy eating and physical activity to pre-school and school-aged children. The campaign focuses on four basic themes: the importance of breakfast, healthy snacks, physical activity, and balancing what you eat with what you do. The campaign's primary communication vehicle is Power Panther™, a spokes-character who conveys nutrition and physical activity messages in a fun and non-threatening way as a peer. Future projects in this campaign include Spanish language materials, an interactive web site with an expanded children's page, public service announcements, and a multi-year development and promotion plan.