

Climbing MyPyramid.gov Encounters With the 2005 Dietary Guidelines

I both laughed and winced as I read one journalist's personal account of his attempts to make all his meals and snacks fit in with the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

I smiled not only because it was a witty tale, but also because I too—even with more than 20 years in nutrition research—find that meeting the recommendations in the *Guidelines* every day isn't a slam-dunk.

Actually, for most people, eating right still requires a good deal of thought—whether shopping for food, preparing a meal, deciding what to order when dining out with family or friends, or just choosing a sensible snack when you're on the go.

Then there's the matter of physical activity. The *Dietary Guidelines* now include physical activity recommendations to help us maintain a body weight that's within a healthy range.

At the Agricultural Research Service, we intend to find out what can be done to help more people jump on the *Dietary Guidelines* bandwagon. We'll do that in research that will eventually include a carefully designed survey of more than 8,000 Americans, focusing on schoolchildren and their parents or caregivers. Scientists at our Human Nutrition Research Centers (see map, page 13) will carry out this investigation. The study will include people from around the country—a diverse sample—so that the findings will be meaningful to all.

The investigation is just one of many examples of how ARS research helps sharpen and strengthen each new edition of the *Guidelines* (they're revised and updated every 5 years). Another ARS study has shown that whole-grain foods appear to help normalize fats (called "lipids") in the bloodstream. The 2005 *Guidelines* are the first to highlight the nutritional goodness of whole grains by recommending consumption of at least 3 ounces of whole grains a day.

There's more: ARS investigations of Bing cherries showed that they can help fight inflammation, a condition that underlies arthritis and heart disease.

When they're deliberating the daily recommendation for whole grains and fruits, this is exactly the kind of science-based information that members of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee want to have on hand.

Besides these studies of foods, ARS scientists also examine individual nutrients, including minerals like iron, zinc, calcium, and magnesium; and vitamins like folic acid, B-12, and K—to help determine our requirement for each. For instance, ARS-funded studies have shown that women who ate higher amounts of vitamin K had a lower risk of hip fractures, weak bones (low bone mass), and osteoarthritis than did those who ate lower amounts of this essential nutrient.

These findings might first be used by the experts who set what are known as the "Dietary Reference Intakes" or "DRIs" for vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients.

DRIs also become part of the pool of knowledge that other experts—the members of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee—consider in determining the groups of foods, and quantities of each, that will provide the DRIs of the nutrients we need.

There's yet another way that we help the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee decide the amounts of each food group that people need. We provide the best available information on the nutrients and health-promoting components found in many common foods. This food-composition information is readily accessible to all via the USDA National Nutrient Database at www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/. It's updated often, so it stays current with what Americans are eating. The mushroom category, for instance, now includes trendy types such as chanterelles.

So how am I doing in making the recommendations in the *Dietary Guidelines* part of my life?

I've of course been to MyPyramid.gov to get my personalized plan. Probably the toughest elements for me involve getting enough fruits, vegetables, and physical activity.

But I think I'm making good progress.

Who knows? I may have even those tough ones under control by the time the 2010 *Guidelines* come out.

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Visit www.MyPyramid.gov
for an eating plan personalized just for you.