

The Upcoming 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans:

Too Many Calories, Too Few Nutrients: Achieving Balance with Fruits and Vegetables

The information source for this fact sheet is the 2005 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee Report; the official Dietary Guidelines for Americans will be released in early January 2005.

Dietary data suggests that although Americans consume more than enough calories, most Americans do not consume enough vitamins A & C, potassium, magnesium, and fiber.

- Americans get only half the amount of potassium and fiber they need.
- Most Americans don't get enough vitamin C, vitamin A, and magnesium.
- More than two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese.

Fruits and vegetables are naturally low in calories and are rich in vitamins A & C, potassium, magnesium, and fiber. Eating more fruits and vegetables can help prevent weight gain, help with weight loss, and provide many nutrients Americans don't get enough of.

How Eating More Fruits and Vegetables Helps Control Weight

- Fruits and vegetables can help you feel full on fewer calories than if you ate the same amount of many other foods. That's because fruits and vegetables are high in water and fiber content and therefore low in calories relative to their volume.
- Studies show that a low-fat diet that allows unlimited consumption of fruits and vegetables can lead to sustained weight loss. How? Controlling hunger is critical to success when trying to lose weight. Because fruits and vegetables are high in fiber and water, they can help give you a satisfying amount of food that's still low in calories.
- Studies show that when people simply start eating more fruits and vegetables, they spontaneously eat fewer calories. That's because people tend to eat similar amounts of food even when the calories in the food vary. When people eat more low-calorie foods, such as fruits and vegetables, they naturally eat fewer high-calorie foods.
- Focusing on a positive message like "eat more fruits and vegetables" without emphasizing what you can't eat, allows people to lower their calorie intake naturally without having to count calories.

How Fruits and Vegetables Fill the Nutrient Gap

Potassium: *Most Americans get less than half the amount of potassium they need for healthy blood pressure.*

In addition to helping maintain healthy blood pressure, potassium assists in muscle contractions, maintaining fluid and electrolyte balance in cells, transmitting nerve impulses, and releasing energy during metabolism.

Some of the best sources of potassium may come as a surprise.

- Great sources of potassium include: dark leafy greens like spinach, sweet potatoes, winter squash, potatoes, orange juice and beans like white beans, pinto beans, and kidney beans.
- Examples of ways to fill the potassium gap include adding the following to a typical daily diet: 1 cup of cooked leafy greens AND 1 cup of winter squash or 1 sweet potato.
- It would take 8 ½ cups of sliced bananas to meet adult daily potassium needs.

Fiber: *Most Americans get less than half the amount of fiber they need for a healthy heart.*

Fiber helps maintain a healthy digestive tract and helps lower cholesterol.

Bran cereal and whole wheat aren't the only good sources of fiber. In fact, most beans provide more than two times as much fiber per half cup, compared to many whole grain cereals.

- Great sources of fiber include beans like navy beans, kidney beans, and split peas, raspberries, pears, green peas, blackberries, Brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes, dark leafy greens like spinach, parsnips, broccoli, and blueberries.
- Examples of ways to fill the fiber gap include adding the following to a typical daily diet: 1) ½ cup of cooked beans and ½ cup of cooked, mixed vegetables OR 2) 1 cup of mixed vegetables and one pear or apple each day.
- One half cup of kidney beans or 1 cup of raspberries each contain 8 grams of fiber compared to 5 grams in a cup of wheat cereal.

Vitamin C: *More than half of all Americans don't get nearly enough vitamin C.*

In addition to being a powerful dietary antioxidant that protects cells from damage, vitamin C also strengthens blood vessels, maintains healthy gums, and helps absorb iron.

Orange juice isn't the only great source of vitamin C. One-third cup of sliced red bell pepper has the same amount of vitamin C as one cup of orange juice.

- Other great sources of vitamin C include papayas, green peppers, strawberries, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, grapefruit, peas, kiwi, sweet potatoes, cantaloupe, mangoes, cauliflower, pineapple, dark leafy greens, cabbage, asparagus, honeydew melon, okra, watermelon, tangerines, winter squash, and summer squash.
- Examples of ways to meet vitamin C requirements include adding the following to a typical daily diet: 1) ½ cup red bell pepper OR 2) ¾ cup green pepper OR 3) 1 cup cooked broccoli OR 4) 1 cup of strawberries.

Vitamin A: *More than half of Americans don't get nearly enough vitamin A.*

Vitamin A is important for vision, gene expression, healthy cells, growth, immune function, and maintenance of healthy bones, teeth, and hair.

There are plenty of great sources of vitamin A in addition to carrots. One sweet potato has more than twice as much vitamin A as a cup of sliced carrots.

- Great sources of vitamin A include carrots, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, dark leafy greens like spinach, winter squash, red bell peppers, Chinese cabbage, and cantaloupe.
- Examples of ways to meet vitamin A requirements include adding the following to a typical daily diet: 1) 1 sweet potato OR 2) 1 cup cooked carrots OR 3) 1 cup cooked greens and 1 cup butternut squash.

Magnesium: *More than half of Americans don't get nearly enough magnesium.*

Magnesium is important for the development and maintenance of bones and activating the enzymes necessary for energy release.

- Great sources of magnesium include cooked spinach, soybeans, white beans, black beans, lima beans, beet greens, navy beans, black-eyed peas, great northern beans, pinto beans, and kidney beans.

- One example of how to meet magnesium requirements would be to add the following to a typical daily diet: 1) 1 ½ cups cooked spinach AND 1 cup of cooked, black beans or lima beans.

Why Fruits and Vegetables Are Better Than Pills

Only fruits and vegetables, not pills or supplements, can give you phytochemicals and nutrients in the healthy combinations nature intended.

"Many people understand the importance of good nutrition but believe that a daily vitamin pill will substitute for actually eating the foods that they know are good for them. However, the more scientists learn about nutrition and the human body, the more they realize the importance of eating whole foods. It is possible that nutrients are most beneficial to health when they are consumed in their natural form and in combination with each other, which occurs when a person consumes foods such as fruits, vegetables (including legumes), and whole grains. These foods contain not only well-known vitamins and minerals that are often found in vitamin pills, but also hundreds of naturally occurring substances, including carotenoids, flavonoids and isoflavones, and protease inhibitors that may protect against cancer, heart disease, and other chronic health conditions." — 2005 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee Report

To get a broad range of nutrients, Americans should eat a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables— green, yellow-orange, red, blue-purple, and white. Each color offers something unique, like different combinations of vitamins, minerals, and disease-fighting phytochemicals.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans is a report issued by law every 5 years from the secretaries of Health and Human Services and Agriculture that "shall contain nutritional and dietary information and guidelines for the general public." The recommendations are based on the preponderance of scientific and medical knowledge on food and health current at the time of publication of the committee's report. By law, the Dietary Guidelines form the basis of Federal food, nutrition education, and information programs.