

New US dietary guidelines: No candy, cake for kids under 2

December 30 2020, by Carla K. Johnson



In this Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2020 file photo, Valentina Frey of Switzerland breasts feed her daughter, Charlotte Katharina, in the Paul VI hall on the occasion of the weekly general audience at the Vatican. Pope Francis at the start of his audience mentioned her as an example of tenderness and beauty. Released on Tuesday, Dec. 29, 2020, the first U.S. government dietary guidelines for infants and toddlers recommend exclusive feeding of breast milk for at least six months and no added sugar for children under age 2. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

Parents now have an extra reason to say no to candy, cake and ice cream for young children. The first U.S. government dietary guidelines for infants and toddlers, released Tuesday, recommend feeding only breast milk for at least six months and no added sugar for children under age 2.

"It's never too early to start," said Barbara Schneeman, a nutritionist at University of California, Davis. "You have to make every bite count in those early years."

The guidelines stop short of two key recommendations from scientists advising the government. Those advisers said in July that everyone should limit their added sugar intake to less than 6% of calories and men should limit alcohol to one drink per day.

Instead, the guidelines stick with previous advice: limit added sugar to less than 10% of calories per day after age 2. And men should limit alcohol to no more than two drinks per day, twice as much as advised for women.

"I don't think we're finished with alcohol," said Schneeman, who chaired a committee advising the government on the guidelines. "There's more we need to learn."

The [dietary guidelines](#) are issued every five years by the Agriculture Department and the Department of Health and Human Services. The government uses them to set standards for school lunches and other programs. Some highlights:

INFANTS, TODDLERS AND MOMS

Babies should have only [breast milk](#) at least until they reach 6 months,

the guidelines say. If breast milk isn't available, they should get iron-fortified [infant formula](#) during the first year. Babies should get supplemental vitamin D beginning soon after birth.

Babies can start eating other [food](#) at about 6 months and should be introduced to potential allergenic foods along with other foods.

"Introducing peanut-containing foods in the first year reduces the risk that an infant will develop a food allergy to peanuts," the guidelines say.

There's more advice than in prior guidelines for pregnant and breastfeeding women. To promote [healthy brain development](#) in their babies, these women should eat 8 to 12 ounces of seafood per week. They should be sure to choose fish—such as cod, salmon, sardines and tilapia—with lower levels of mercury, which can harm children's nervous systems.

Pregnant women should not drink alcohol, according to the guidelines, and breastfeeding women should be cautious. Caffeine in modest amounts appears safe and women can discuss that with their doctors.

ALCOHOL AND MEN

In July, the science advisers suggested men who drink alcohol should limit themselves to one serving per day—a 12-ounce can of beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine or a shot of liquor. Tuesday's official guidelines ignored that, keeping the advice for men at two drinks per day.

Dr. Westley Clark of Santa Clara University said that's appropriate. Heavy drinking and [binge drinking](#) are harmful, he said, but the evidence isn't as clear for moderate drinking.

Lowering the limit for men would likely be socially, religiously or

culturally unacceptable to many, Clark said, which could have ripple effects for the rest of the guidelines.

"They need to be acceptable to people, otherwise they'll reject it outright and we'll be worse off," he said. "If you lose the public, these guidelines have no merit whatsoever."

More careful scientific research into the long-term effects of low or moderate levels of drinking is needed, he said.

WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE?

Most Americans fall short of following the best advice on nutrition, contributing to obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Much of the new advice sounds familiar: Load your plate with fruits and vegetables, and cut back on sweets, saturated fats and sodium.

The guidelines suggest making small changes that add up: Substitute plain shredded wheat for frosted cereal. Choose low-sodium canned black beans. Drink sparkling water instead of soda.

"It is really important to make healthier choices, every meal, every day, to develop a pattern of healthy eating," said Pam Miller of the Agriculture Department's food and nutrition service.

There's an app to help people follow the guidelines available through the government's [My Plate](#) website.

READ LABELS

The biggest sources of added sugars in the typical U.S. diet are soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages, desserts, snacks, candy and sweetened coffee and tea. These foods contribute very little nutrition, so the

guidelines advise limits.

There's information on [added sugar](#) on the "Nutrition Facts" label on packaged foods. Information on saturated fats and sodium is on the label too.

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