

Quinn on Nutrition: What to like about those new dietary guidelines

18 January 2021, by Barbara Quinn



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They're here ... the long awaited and debated 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA). What's the big deal? This document—updated every five years by the Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS)—represents the most current science-based advice on what and how to eat and drink for our best health.

If you're looking for this newest installment to insist you eat this or don't eat that, you may be disappointed. Rather, the 2020-2025 DGA's focus on a "pattern" of eating that has been shown to carry health benefits. Within that pattern, we can make choices that best fit our individual needs and preferences.

I like that. There's room here for meat eaters and vegans alike. And for the first time, these guidelines are presented according to our life stages, including pregnancy, infants and toddlers.

These updated guidelines do, however, advise us to limit—at every life stage—our intake of four [dietary components](#): added sugars, sodium,

saturated fat and alcohol. There's not room for much of these in any healthful dietary pattern, say experts.

Not everyone is jumping for joy over the revised DGAs, however. Some say they haven't changed much and question why we are still fat and unhealthy in spite of previous recommendations.

That's like blaming [traffic signs](#) on a rise in car accidents. There is good evidence that—if we would practice what the guidelines preach—our reward could be a wide range of health benefits. Unfortunately, most Americans are not even close.

It does give us a place to start, however. Check how you're doing with each of these core elements of a healthful dietary pattern: Vegetables of all colors and types, including beans and lentils. Fruits, especially whole fruits. Grains, half which are whole grains. Dairy, including fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese, and/or lactose-free versions and fortified soy alternatives. Protein foods, including lean meats, poultry, and eggs; seafood; beans, peas, and lentils; nuts, seeds, and soy products. Oils, including vegetable oils and oils in seafood, avocados and nuts.

With the science must come practice, say experts. Guess I'll reach for a banana instead of chips. Mix up my [protein foods](#) to include beans, lentils and peanut butter as well as poultry, lean meat and cheese. Choose a fish-based meal at least a couple times a week. And enjoy my wine in moderation.

Your goals may be different. Find the dietary pattern that fits your needs and calorie limit in this 9th edition of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. [DietaryGuidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov). Let's make every bite count!

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