The United States is facing an epidemic of obesity. Almost two-thirds of its citizens are overweight or obese, and more than half get too little physical activity.

Americans need to understand that daily choices in food and physical activity affect health today, tomorrow, and in the future. Eating right and being physically active are critical to a healthy lifestyle and are not just a "diet" or a "program."

The federal government’s 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans is the best science-based advice available for Americans over the age of two. It advises what to eat to promote health and reduce the risk of chronic diet-related disease. Three key recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines are:

- eat a variety of foods in moderation,
- pay attention to portion sizes, and
- get regular physical activity.

All foods can fit within this framework and a healthful diet. Adopting these lifestyle changes increases the chances for a longer life and reduces the risk for chronic diet-related diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis and certain cancers.

Make smart choices from every food group, and get the most nutrition out of calories consumed. Follow these nine recommendations about the types and amounts of foods to eat, as well as the level of physical activity needed.

**Adequate Nutrients Within Caloric Needs**

Eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods and beverages from the basic food groups. Choose foods and beverages that are low in saturated fats and trans fats, cholesterol, added sugars, salt and alcohol. Nutrient-dense foods are packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other nutrients but are lower in calories.

Meet recommended intakes within energy needs by adopting a balanced eating pattern, such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Guide or the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) Eating Plan. Learn more about the DASH eating plan at: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash

**Weight Management**

To maintain body weight in a healthy range, balance calories from foods and beverages with calories burned.

To prevent gradual weight gain over time, make small decreases in food and beverage calories and increase physical activity.

**Physical Activity**

Find the balance between food and physical activity. Be physically active every day to promote health, psychological well-being, and a healthy body weight.

- Reduce the risk of chronic disease in adulthood by getting at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. This should be in addition to usual activity at work or at home.
- For most people, more vigorous activity for a longer period of time brings even greater health benefits.
- Manage body weight and prevent gradual, unhealthy weight gain in adulthood. Get approximately 60 minutes of moderate to
vigorous exercise on most days of the week while not exceeding caloric intake needs.

- Sustain weight loss in adulthood by participating in at least 60 to 90 minutes of daily moderate-intensity physical activity while not exceeding caloric intake needs. Some people may need to consult with a healthcare provider before participating in this level of activity.
- Achieve physical fitness by including:
  - cardiovascular conditioning,
  - stretching exercises for flexibility, and
  - resistance exercise or calisthenics for muscle strength and endurance.

Food Groups to Encourage
A healthy eating plan emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. In addition, it includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts. Choosing foods that do little to meet nutrient needs can put good health at risk, although those foods may be within the allowed daily calorie, or energy needs.

Fruits & Vegetables: Eat a sufficient amount of fruits and vegetables while staying within energy needs. Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables each day.

Two cups of fruit per day are recommended for a 2,000-calorie intake, with higher or lower amounts depending on the calorie level. For example, two cups of fruit could be a small banana, a large orange, and ¼ cup of dried apricots or peaches. Eat fresh, frozen, canned, or dried fruit, rather than drinking fruit juice, for most of your fruit choices.

Eat 2½ cups of vegetables daily, including more dark green vegetables. Select from all five vegetable subgroups several times a week.

Dark Green Vegetables: Broccoli, spinach, collards, turnip greens, kale, beet and mustard greens, green leaf lettuce, and romaine lettuce.

Orange Vegetables: Carrots, sweet potatoes, winter squash, and pumpkin.

Legumes: Dry beans, such as pinto beans, kidney beans, black beans, and garbanzo beans, peas, chickpeas, and lentils.

Starchy Vegetables: Corn, white potatoes, and green peas.

Other Vegetables: Tomatoes, cabbage, celery, cucumber, lettuce, onions, peppers, green beans, cauliflower, mushrooms, and summer squash.

Whole Grain Products: Eat 6 or more one ounce-equivalents* of grains per day, with at least half of this amount being whole-grain products. Examples are 100% whole wheat, whole oats/oatmeal, brown and wild rice, popcorn, bulgur (cracked wheat), whole rye, and whole-grain barley. The word "whole" should appear in front of the grain on the ingredient list of crackers, breads and cereals.

Milk & Milk Products: Consume 3 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or an equal amount of low-fat yogurt and/or low-fat cheese. One and one-half ounces of cheese equals 1 cup of milk. People who cannot consume milk may choose lactose-free milk products and/or calcium-fortified foods and beverages.

Children two to eight years of age should consume 2 cups per day, and children nine years of age and older should consume 3 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products.

Fats
Choose fats wisely for good health. Read the Nutrition Facts label on foods, and look for foods low in saturated fats and trans fats.

- Consume less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fatty acids and less than 300 mg/day of cholesterol. Keep trans fatty acid consumption to one percent or less of total calories.
- Keep total fat intake between 20 to 35 percent of calories, with most fats coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, such as fish, nuts, and vegetable oils.
- When selecting and preparing meat, poultry, dry beans, and milk or milk products, make choices that are lean, low-fat, or fat-free.
• Bake, broil, or grill meats and poultry. Vary protein choices, eating more fish, beans, peas, nuts, and seeds.
• Eat at least two servings of fish high in omega-3 fatty acids per week. Omega-3 fatty acids, which have been shown to protect the heart, are also found in soybeans, canola, flaxseeds and walnuts.
• Limit intake of fats and oils high in saturated and/or trans fatty acids, and choose products low in such fats and oils.

Carbohydrates
• Choose fiber-rich fruits, vegetables, and whole grains often.
• Choose and prepare foods and beverages with little added sugars or caloric sweeteners, such as amounts suggested by the USDA Food Guide and the DASH Eating Plan.
• Reduce the incidence of dental caries by practicing good oral hygiene and consuming sugar-and starch-containing foods and beverages less frequently.

Sodium
• Consume less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day, which is approximately 1 teaspoon of salt.
• Choose and prepare foods with little salt. At the same time, eat potassium-rich foods, such as fruits and vegetables.

Alcoholic Beverages
• Those who choose to drink alcoholic beverages should do so sensibly and in moderation—defined as the consumption of up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men.
• Alcoholic beverages should not be consumed by some individuals, including: —those who cannot restrict their alcohol intake,
  ✓ women of childbearing age who may become pregnant,
  ✓ pregnant and lactating women,
  ✓ children and adolescents,
  ✓ individuals taking medications that can interact with alcohol, and
  ✓ those with specific medical conditions.
• Alcoholic beverages should be avoided by individuals engaging in activities that require attention, skill, or coordination, such as driving or operating machinery.

Food Safety
To avoid microbial foodborne illness:
• Clean hands, food contact surfaces, and fruits and vegetables. Meat and poultry should not be washed or rinsed.
• Separate raw, cooked, and ready-to-eat foods while shopping, preparing, or storing foods.
• Cook foods to a safe temperature to kill microorganisms.
• Chill (refrigerate) perishable food promptly and defrost foods properly.
• Avoid the following:
  ✓ raw ( unpasteurized) milk or any products made from unpasteurized milk,
  ✓ raw or partially cooked eggs or foods containing raw eggs,
  ✓ raw or undercooked meat and poultry,
  ✓ unpasteurized juices, and
  ✓ raw sprouts.

By law the Dietary Guidelines is reviewed, updated if necessary, and published every five years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

Note: The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 contains additional recommendation for specific populations. The full document is available at www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines. This website also contains a new consumer booklet, "Finding Your Way to a Healthier You," which is based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

To reflect the updates and changes in the Dietary Guidelines, the U.S. Department of Agriculture replaced the Food Guide Pyramid with a revised consumer guidance graphic in 2005. It is available at www.mypyramid.gov.

Sources:

This information has been reviewed and adapted for use in South Carolina by J. G. Hunter, HGIC Information Specialist, and K. L. Cason, Professor, State EFNEP Coordinator, Clemson University. (New 09/05.)

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