

Source: DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS, 2005  
(<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines>)

## **IMPORTANCE OF THE *DIETARY GUIDELINES* FOR HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION**

Major causes of morbidity and mortality in the United States are related to poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle. Specific diseases and conditions linked to poor diet include cardiovascular disease, hypertension, dyslipidemia, type 2 diabetes, overweight and obesity, osteoporosis, constipation, diverticular disease, iron deficiency anemia, oral disease, malnutrition, and some cancers.

Lack of physical activity has been associated with cardiovascular disease, hypertension, overweight and obesity, osteoporosis, diabetes, and certain cancers. Furthermore, muscle strengthening and improving balance can reduce falls and increase functional status among older adults.

Together with physical activity, and a high quality diet that does not provide excess calories should enhance the health of most individuals.

Poor diet and physical inactivity, resulting in an energy imbalance (more calories consumed than expended), are the most important factors contributing to the increase in overweight and obesity in this country. Moreover, overweight and obesity are major risk factors for certain chronic disease such as diabetes. In 1999–2002, 65 percent of U.S. adults were overweight, an increase from 56 percent in 1988–1994. Data from 1999–2002 also showed that 30 percent of adults were obese, an increase from 23 percent in an earlier survey.

In order to reverse this trend, many Americans need to consume fewer calories, be more active, and make wiser choices within and among food groups. The *Dietary Guidelines* provides a framework to promote healthier lifestyles. Given the importance of a balanced diet to health, the intent of the *Dietary Guidelines* is to summarize and synthesize knowledge regarding individual nutrients and food components into recommendations for an overall pattern of eating that can be adopted by the general public.

These patterns are exemplified by the USDA Food Guide and the Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension (DASH) Eating Plan (<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/introduction.htm>). The

*Dietary Guidelines* is applicable to the food preferences of different racial/ethnic groups, vegetarians, and other groups. This concept of balance eating patterns should be utilized in planning diets for various population groups.

There is a growing body of evidence which demonstrates that following a diet that complies with the *Dietary Guidelines* may reduce the risk of chronic disease. Recently, it was reported that dietary patterns consistent with recommended dietary guidance were associated with a lower risk of mortality among individuals age 45 years and older in the United States. The authors of the study estimated that about 16 percent and 9 percent of mortality from any cause in men and women, respectively, could be eliminated by the adoption of desirable dietary behaviors. Currently, adherence to the *Dietary Guidelines* is low among the U.S. population. Data from USDA illustrate the degree of change in the overall dietary pattern of Americans needed to be consistent with a food pattern encouraged by the *Dietary Guidelines*.

A basic premise of the *Dietary Guidelines* is that nutrient needs should be met primarily through consuming foods. Foods provide an array of nutrients (as well as phytochemicals, antioxidants, etc.) and other compounds that may have beneficial effects on health. In some cases, fortified foods may be useful sources of one or more nutrients that otherwise might be consumed in less than recommended amounts. Supplements may be useful when they fill a specific identified nutrient gap that cannot or is not otherwise being met by the individual's intake of food. Nutrient supplements cannot replace a healthful diet. Individuals who are already consuming the recommended amount of a nutrient in food will not achieve any additional health benefit if they also take nutrient as a supplement. In fact, in some cases, supplements and fortified foods may cause intakes to exceed the safe levels of nutrients. Another important premise of the *Dietary Guidelines* is that foods should be prepared and handled in such a way that reduces risk of food borne illnesses.