

What should Americans eat? Experts announce 8 new food “rules”



I was happy that Penelope Slade-Sawyer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), openly recognized the severity of America’s obesity epidemic when she said, “Obesity is the single greatest threat to public health in this century,” as she released a new report by 13 of the country’s top scientists last week. [Get EatingWell’s 4-week meal plan for a slimmer you here.](#)

Every five years, HHS and the USDA publish the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which

basically tell us what we *should* be eating. To advise them on what these nutrition “rules” should be, the Secretaries of these two agencies appoint a committee of top scientists to review loads of research and come up with an advisory report that will serve as the basis for the Dietary Guidelines (which also inform the food pyramid—see it at MyPyramid.gov).

Last week, the 13 scientists appointed to the advisory committee released their report. Important note: These aren’t the final Dietary Guidelines—we won’t get those until the end of 2010. The point is to give all Americans—from you and your neighbor right on up to lobbyists for various food companies—the opportunity to comment on and help shape the proposed guidelines.

We’ve summarized some of the experts’ main points here:

1. Eat fewer calories.

Do you have any idea how many calories you are eating? No, we guessed not. For most people it’s somewhere around 2,000 calories—to maintain their current weight.

Related Link: [Find out how many calories you need to eat each day to maintain your weight or lose weight, and get delicious recipes to help you stick to your goals.](#)

2. Get more of your food from plants.

This report emphasizes eating more vegetables, cooked dry beans and peas, fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds. Eating vegetarian isn't so hard, we think, when you can make delicious [Black Bean Croquettes and 20 more must-try vegetarian recipes here](#).

3. Eat more fish.

For a while now, most health experts have been recommending that people eat two servings of fish a week to get the heart-healthy omega-3 fats they provide, but this is the first time that the advice to increase intake of seafood has been made for the population as a whole. The previous recommendation in 2005 to eat more fish was specific for the population at risk—people with heart disease to reduce their risk of mortality.

Related Link: [Find 6 of the healthiest fish to eat, and 6 to avoid.](#)

4. Switch to low-fat dairy.

Full-fat dairy products are high in saturated fat, which has been linked with health problems, including heart disease. Choose low- or nonfat dairy to limit intake of saturated fat. Including dairy in your diet is a great way to get calcium—a bone-strengthening mineral that most of us don't get enough of. Plus, new research suggests that replacing full-fat dairy with low-fat dairy may also help lower blood pressure.

5. Eat only moderate amounts of lean meats, poultry and eggs.

Notice the focus on *moderate* amounts of lean meats—this is new. Previously the recommendation was to make choices that were lean, low-fat or fat-free. Now the recommendation takes it a step further and suggests cutting back on quantity.

6. Reduce intake of added sugars and solid fats.

Eat fewer foods containing added sugars and solid fats (e.g., butter), which contribute calories and few, if any, nutrients.

Related Link: [Get recipes, such as Peanut Butter & Pretzel Truffles, to satisfy your sweet cravings with surprisingly low added sugars here.](#)

7. Reduce sodium and refined grains.

Their advice is to lower your consumption of sodium and refined grains (such as white breads, pasta, etc.), especially refined grains that are coupled with added sugar, solid fats and sodium.

8. Exercise!

Are you meeting the current Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, which encourage all adults to do 2 1/2 hours a week of moderate-intensity or 1 1/4 hours (75 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity or an equivalent combination? If not, the experts suggest you do. These guidelines also recommend

muscle-strengthening exercises that are moderate or high intensity, and involve all major muscle groups, 2 or more days a week.

Sounds simple, right? Of course, Michael Pollan may have said it even more simply. His main food rule? “Eat food. Mostly plants. Not too much.”

Tell us what you think Americans should and shouldn't be eating and we'll pass it on to the advisory committee.

By Nicci Micco

Nicci Micco is deputy editor of features and nutrition at *EatingWell* and co-author of *EatingWell 500-Calorie Dinners*. She has a master's degree in nutrition and food sciences, with a focus in weight management. She's addicted to ice cream and pizza. But she also can't imagine going a week without eating sweet potatoes, salad greens or kidney beans. Kale and beets also rank at the top of her favorite-foods list.

Related Links from EatingWell:

- [Use our free Menu Planner Tool to plan a day's worth of meals that help you stick to your calorie goals.](#)
- [You won't have to sacrifice flavor with these yummy low-sodium recipes.](#)
- [Get ideas for 6 ways to exercise without even knowing it here.](#)
- [Get a free trial issue when you subscribe to EatingWell Magazine and sign up for our free e-newsletters!](#)