

New government dietary guidelines may require altering habits

February 3 2011, By Neil Schoenherr

Are you looking to make the government's new dietary recommendations part of your life? Begin by writing down what you eat, says a nutrition expert at Washington University in St. Louis.

“As a registered dietitian, the first thing I'd recommend is to take a look at where you are right now,” says Connie Diekman, director of University Nutrition. “Keep a food record for three or four days and see how much sodium and fat you really are consuming.”

The U.S. departments of Agriculture and Health & Human Services this week released the [2010 Dietary Guidelines for America](#). The guidelines call for more fruits and vegetables, less sodium and more whole grain, as well as more exercise for all Americans.

“These aren't drastic changes from the government's 2005 report, but there are some very strong messages that consumers need to hear,” Diekman says.

The first is that we should consume more plant foods. Those include fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

“The evidence here is strong,” says Diekman, who is a past president of the American Dietetic Association. “We need to increase fruits and vegetables and choose at least half of our daily grain as whole grain. This is how you stay healthy.”

Another key indicator in the report is that American consumption of sodium continues to be very high.

“This new report says we should consume less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day,” Diekman says. “However, if you have hypertension or diabetes, if you are over the age of 51 or if you’re African American, which, if you add up all four of those constitutes more than 50 percent of the population, then you should be shooting for 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day. That is less than a teaspoon.”

Diekman says many people don’t even realize they are consuming too much sodium.

“I do think we need to make some changes in our [sodium](#) intake,” she says. “The evidence is clear. However, it’s going to be a hard challenge for people to get to 1,500 when we’re currently at 3,400.”

Diekman suggests that reducing salt in food equates to a palette change. “Either cook with salt or put it on the table, don’t do both,” she says. “Also, reduce the amount of processed or packaged foods you eat. Really begin to examine how much salt you’re getting in your diet.”

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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