

US advisory group makes recommendations on diet

February 19 2015, byMary Clare Jalonick



In this Nov. 25, 2014 file photo, eggs for sale are seen in a Des Moines, Iowa grocery store. Drink less sugary soda, but an extra cup of coffee or two is OK. So are eggs. And as always, don't forget your vegetables. A government advisory committee is recommending the first real limits on added sugars, but backs off stricter ones for salt and cholesterol intake. It calls for an environmentally friendly diet lower in red and processed meats. (AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall, File)

A U.S. government advisory panel of medical and nutrition experts on

Thursday recommended an environmentally friendly diet lower in red and processed meats. But the panel would reverse previous guidance on limiting dietary cholesterol. And it says the caffeine in a few cups of coffee could actually be beneficial.

The committee also is backing off stricter limits on salt. It's recommending the first real limits on added sugar, saying that's especially a problem for young people.

The Agriculture and Health and Human Services Departments will take those recommendations into account in writing final 2015 dietary guidelines by the end of the year. The guidelines affect nutritional patterns throughout the country—from federally subsidized school lunches to food package labels to your doctor's advice.

Even with the changes, the report sticks to the basic message of the previous guidelines in 2010: Eat more fruits and vegetables and whole grains; eat less saturated fats, salt and sugar.

EGGS ARE OK

The report says dietary [cholesterol](#) now is "not considered a nutrient of concern for overconsumption." This follows increasing medical research showing the amount of cholesterol in your bloodstream is more complicated than once thought.

The committee says available evidence "shows no appreciable relationship" between heart disease and how much [dietary cholesterol](#) you eat, but it still recommends eating less saturated fat. As in previous years, the report advises limiting saturated fats to 10 percent of total calories.

The panel doesn't give a specific recommendation for how much

cholesterol—or eggs—a person may eat.

WATCH THE ADDED SUGAR

Added sugars should be no more than about 200 calories a day—about the amount in one 16-ounce sugary drink, says the advisory committee.

The recommendation is part of a larger push in recent years to help consumers isolate added sugars from naturally occurring ones like those in fruit and milk. Added sugars generally add empty calories to the diet.

Americans now get about 13 percent of their calories from added sugar, or 268 calories a day, the committee says. Older children, adolescents and young adults generally take in more.

Sugary drinks should be replaced with water instead of those with low-calorie sweeteners; there's not enough evidence those drinks can help with weight loss, the committee advises.

A SOFTER APPROACH ON SALT

Sodium adds up quickly. A turkey sandwich and a cup of soup can average about 2,200 milligrams.

That's just under the committee's recommendation of 2,300 milligrams a day for all people, even those most at risk for heart disease.

The 2010 [dietary guidelines](#) had recommended those at risk for heart disease limit sodium to 1,500 milligrams. The new report said lowering to that amount can still be helpful for some. The new advice follows a 2013 report by the Institute of Medicine that said there is no good evidence that eating less than 2,300 milligrams a day of sodium offers benefits.

A HEARTY ENDORSEMENT FOR COFFEE

The report looks at caffeine for the first time, and says coffee is OK—even beneficial. The panel says there is strong evidence that 3 to 5 cups a day can be part of a healthy diet, and there's consistent evidence that it's even associated with reduced risk of type 2 diabetes and [heart disease](#).

The advice comes with some caveats—don't add calories with cream, milk and added sugars. The report also advises against large-size energy drinks that are popular in the marketplace, and it recommends pregnant women limit caffeine to two cups of coffee a day.

EAT A PLANT-BASED DIET

The panel recommends eating more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds. A plant-based diet is "more health promoting and is associated with less environmental impact" than the current U.S. diet, which is high in meat.

The [report](#) stops short of telling people not to eat meat, saying "no food groups need to be eliminated completely to improve sustainability outcomes."

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Citation: US advisory group makes recommendations on diet (2015, February 19) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-02-advisory-group-diet.html>

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