

Hold the 16-oz drink, limit salt—gov't offers guidelines (Update 3)

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Better cut down on sugar, especially those 16-ounce drinks, and limit your salt. But you might not need to worry quite as much about eggs.

The Obama administration's latest dietary guidelines, released Thursday, seek to help Americans reduce their likelihood of disease and obesity through a more healthful diet. The newest guidance comes down hard on sugar that's added to food and drinks but says lean meat is a healthy protein and more eggs may be OK, despite years of advice to the contrary.

Released every five years, the guidelines inform everything from food package labels to subsidized school lunches to your doctor's advice. And the main message hasn't changed much over time: Eat your fruits and vegetables. Whole grains and seafood, too. And keep sugar, fats and salt in moderation.

The government says people should figure out what healthy eating style works for them while still hewing to the main recommendations. The Agriculture Department, which released the guidelines along with the Department of Health and Human Services, is also putting out a tweaked version of its healthy "My Plate" icon to include a new slogan: "My Wins."

"Small changes can add up to big differences," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

LEAN MEAT IS OK

After a significant backlash from the meat industry and Congress, the administration ignored several suggestions from a government advisory panel. That panel had suggested calling for an environmentally friendly diet lower in red and processed meats and de-emphasized lean meats in its list of proteins that are part of a healthful diet.

As in previous years, the government says lean meat is part of a more healthful diet. Buried deeper in the report, though, is language that suggests teenage boys and adult men should reduce meat and eat more vegetables. Government data show that males from 14 to 70 consume more than recommended amounts of meat, eggs and poultry, while women are more in line with advised amounts.

Dr. Richard Wender of the American Cancer Society said the report ignores extensive science on a link between cancer and diet.

"By omitting specific diet recommendations, such as eating less red and processed meat, these guidelines miss a critical and significant opportunity to reduce suffering and death from cancer," Wender said.

CUT OUT THE SUGARY SODAS

One new recommendation is that added sugar should be no more than 10 percent of daily calories.

That's about 200 calories a day, around the amount in one 16-ounce sugary drink. The recommendation is part of a larger push to help

consumers isolate added sugars from naturally occurring ones like those in fruit and milk.

According to the guidelines, sugary drinks comprise 47 percent of the added sugars that Americans drink and eat every day.

TOO MUCH SALT

Americans also need to lower salt intake, the government says. New figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show around 90 percent of people eat too much. The average person eats 3,400 milligrams of sodium a day, and the guidelines say everyone should lower that to 2,300, or about a teaspoon.

Lowering sodium intake was the major push of the 2010 guidelines, and that document recommended that those most at risk of heart disease, or about half the population, lower their intake to 1,500 mg. The new guidelines delete that lower amount as part of the top recommendations. Later on, though, the report says those with high blood pressure and prehypertension could benefit from a steeper reduction.

CHOLESTEROL CONFUSION

After years of doctors saying that Americans shouldn't eat too many eggs, recommendations for cholesterol have also shifted.

The 2010 guidelines made a key recommendation that Americans consume less than 300 mg a day of dietary cholesterol, or about two small eggs. That recommendation is gone, following increasing medical

research showing the amount of cholesterol in your bloodstream is more complicated than once thought. Several more recent studies have shown little relationship between heart disease and dietary cholesterol, focusing more on the kinds of fats consumed.

Still, egg lovers aren't completely off the hook. Discussion of cholesterol deeper into the document says "individuals should eat as little dietary cholesterol as possible while consuming a healthy eating pattern."

FOOD POLITICS

While the guidelines always have been subject to intense lobbying by food industries, this year's version set off unprecedented political debate, fueled by Republicans' claims the administration has gone too far in telling people what to eat.

Congress got involved, successfully encouraging the administration to drop the recommendations based on environmental impact but unsuccessfully proposing to set new standards for the science the guidelines can use.

"It's clear to me and my colleagues that the administration wisely listened to the science and dismissed the interests of political activists," said Alabama Rep. Robert Aderholt, the Republican chairman of the subcommittee that oversees Agriculture Department spending.

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