

New dietary guidelines for Americans

January 12 2021, by Mayo Clinic News Network



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The Dietary Guidelines for Americans have been updated to include, for the first time, recommendations across the lifespan.

Dr. Donald Hensrud, director of the Mayo Clinic Healthy Living Program, says the dietary guidelines, which are updated every five years,

are designed to give the best recommendations on what to eat and drink to promote [health](#) and prevent disease.

One of the changes for this edition of the guidelines is focused on a lifespan approach from infancy to older adulthood. "We've known for quite some time that for the first six months of an infant's life, they should be fed exclusively [human breast milk](#)," says Dr. Hensrud.

"Another addition that people may not be aware of is that when foods are introduced to an infant around the age of 4 to 6 months, peanut-containing foods can be added to the diet after checking with the infant's health care provider. The evidence shows that by adding peanuts early in the diet, it may prevent allergies later on. Also, under the age of 2 years, no added sugars should be included in the diet of children. Added sugars do not provide any health benefit

Key recommendations from the guidelines include:

- For about the first 6 months of life, exclusively feed infants human milk.
- At about 6 months, introduce infants to nutrient-dense complementary foods. Introduce infants to potentially allergenic foods along with other complementary foods.
- From 12 months through older adulthood, follow a healthy dietary pattern across the lifespan to meet nutrient needs, help achieve a healthy body weight and reduce the risk of chronic disease.
- Limit foods and beverages higher in added sugars, saturated fat and sodium, and limit alcoholic beverages.

Dr. Hensrud says that before the guidelines are released, a scientific report on dietary guidelines is published. The dietary guidelines are then derived from this scientific report.

"What many people who work in nutrition would have liked to have seen is a lower limit for added sugars and alcohol. This was included in the scientific report, but did not end up in the Dietary Guidelines," says Dr. Hensrud.

"For example, the [dietary guidelines](#) recommend no more than 10% of calories as added sugars. But the scientific report recommended no more than 6%," he says. "Similarly, previous guidelines recommended up to no more than an average of two drinks per day for men. The scientific report recommended lowering this to one drink a day on average for both men and women. The Dietary Guidelines still recommend up to two drinks a day for men."

Dr. Hensrud says the less added sugars in your diet, the better it will be. "We know that there is very little health benefit and many health risks from including too much [added sugars](#) in the diet. Sugars that are naturally present, such as in fruit, are fine to have in the [diet](#)."

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Citation: New dietary guidelines for Americans (2021, January 12) retrieved 25 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-dietary-guidelines-americans.html>

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