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Reducing Fat in the American Diet

Introduction

Today most Americans are aware that a nutritious diet that is low in fat will lead to a longer and healthier life. To help Americans achieve this goal, the federal government develops dietary guidelines, which give advice about which foods Americans should eat to stay healthy.

Federal Dietary Guidelines

The U. S. Department of Agriculture and the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services release the Dietary Guidelines every five years. Nutrition experts, who study the dietary effects on health, have made recommendations to encourage certain dietary practices.

When first introduced in 1980, “Many groups and individuals from the health professions and the food industry questioned the scientific basis of the guidelines and even the federal government’s authority to advise its citizens on what they should eat.”

Government officials responded by saying that the rapid pace of scientific discovery makes it impossible for average Americans to stay abreast of the most recent information. Government guidelines provide at least a starting point.

Recommended Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Aim for a healthy weight

Be physically active each day

Let the food pyramid guide your food choices

Choose a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains

Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables daily

Keep food safe to eat

Choose a diet that is low in saturated fats and cholesterol

Choose beverages and food to moderate your intake of sugar

Choose and prepare food with less salt

If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation

These guidelines state that a person needs forty different nutrients for good health. No one food provides all the essential nutrients a body needs to stay healthy. Thus, the guidelines recommend that Americans eat a variety of foods from the major food groups. They also emphasize that moderate consumption is the key to good health.

Fat in the American Diet

A major emphasis of the guidelines is to encourage Americans to eat less fat. They recommend limits for total fat intake and saturated fat consumption. The guidelines stress the difference between saturated fats, which tend to raise blood cholesterol and unsaturated fats, which do not. “Aim for a total fat intake of no more that 30 percent of calories. If you need to reduce your fat intake to achieve this level, do so primarily by cutting back on saturated fats.” Foods high in saturated fats include high-fat dairy products such as cheese, whole milk and ice cream as well as processed meats. Everybody needs some fat in their diets, but be sure to choose unsaturated fat such as fish, nuts, olives, avocados and vegetable oils.