



Dietary Guidelines Part I: Energy Balance Guidelines: Energy Balance

Recently I wrote about some of the general recommendations within the latest edition of *the Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Today's column, on *balancing calories to manage weight*, is the first in a series of columns that will take a closer look at some of the major pieces of the *guidelines* and what they mean to us.

One of the greater points in this section is that many of us simply eat more than we need to. In addition, we have room for improvement in the types of food that we choose to eat. Of 97 food categories, grain-based desserts were the largest contributor to overall calories, with soda/energy/sports drinks coming in fourth!

The guidelines go on to recommend changes in eating patterns to improve weight and health status. These changes include eating greater proportions of fruits, vegetables, dairy, whole grains and seafood, and decreased proportions of meats (particularly higher-fat choices). Solid fats (animal fats and *trans* fats) and added sugars (soda/energy/sports drinks, desserts, etc.) were both highlighted as nutrients to greatly reduce.

Physical activity is the other half of the energy balance equation. It is recommended that children are active for 60 minutes per day. Adults get by a little easier—their recommendations are ~150 minutes per week—but few are meeting these recommendations. Thankfully this doesn't need to be traditional 'exercise' like lifting weights or running laps around the track, but can easily be met by including more activities like walking or yard work in your daily routine.

While the *guidelines* encourage individuals to become more conscious of what they eat and do, they also point to numerous environmental factors that affect our ability to make positive choices. The amount of food available and food portion sizes have greatly increased, making it very challenging to eat appropriate amounts. In addition, the number of fast-food restaurants has more than doubled since the 1970s and as we continue to eat out more we place ourselves at greater risk of poor health.

Further, many community environments do not facilitate a physically active lifestyle. Availability of proper sidewalks and safe parks is vital for individuals to feel comfortable being active. How are the sidewalks and parks in your neighborhood? Is it safe for your children to walk to and from school? Transportation and technological advances mean we now need to make a special effort to live physically active lifestyles.

Improvements in these areas on an individual- and population-scale have the potential to greatly improve the health of the nation. The next column in this series will take a careful look at the guidelines' *food and food components to reduce* section. If you're interested in further information feel free to visit www.dietaryguidelines.gov. Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Northeast Wyoming. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu or by phone at 674-2980.