



Dietary Guidelines Part II: Foods to Reduce Guidelines: Foods to Reduce

Recently I wrote about some of the general recommendations within the latest edition of *the Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Today's column, on *food and food components to reduce*, is the second in a series that is taking a closer look at some of the major pieces of the *guidelines* and what they mean to us.

In this piece of the guidelines the following were identified as key foods and nutrients that appear too frequently in the average American diet:

1. **Sodium (salt):** While sodium is an essential nutrient, the average American consumes more than double the amount of sodium necessary for health! This is linked to increases in blood pressure, which in turn increases risk for cardiovascular and kidney diseases. The largest source of sodium in the diet is salt, primarily added during processing of foods. The best ways to reduce your sodium consumption are to eat more fresh and home-prepared foods and fewer processed foods. Note: most individuals only need ~1500mg sodium (less than 2/3 teaspoon) per day.
2. **Solid fats:** *Type* of fat is more important than *amount*, and solid fats (saturated and trans fats) contribute about one-fifth of the calories in American diets but provide few essential nutrients and no dietary fiber. Major food sources of solid fats are desserts, dairy products (cheese/milk), and meats/meat dishes. The *guidelines* recommend reducing these foods and choosing lean/low-fat versions when available.
3. **Added sugars:** As with the solid fats, added sugars contribute a large proportion of our daily calories (~16%) while providing little nutrient value and increasing risk for tooth decay. Major sources of added sugars are soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks. Reducing consumption of these will not only improve health but can save you quite a bit of money as well!
4. **Refined grains:** The process of refining grains strips them of much of their nutritive value. While refined grains are enriched with some vitamins and minerals they still don't stack up to their whole counterparts. Whole grains are great sources of many vitamins, minerals, and fiber, and should make up at least half of the grains we eat. Switching to whole-grain bread is a great place to start as yeast breads make up over one-fourth of the refined grains in the average American diet.

Alcohol and **cholesterol** were also identified as important foods/nutrients to limit. Alcohol, if consumed, should be limited to 1 drink/day for women and two/day for men. While moderate drinking can reduce risk of cardiovascular disease heavy drinking increases risk for many types of cancer and other chronic diseases. Excessive intake of dietary cholesterol contributes to risk for cardiovascular disease—consuming less than 300mg/day will help most individuals maintain normal blood cholesterol levels.

Improvements in these areas of our diet 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' *foods and nutrients to increase* 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.