



Dietary Guidelines Part III: Foods to Increase Guidelines: Foods to Increase

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

The first key recommendation should be no surprise: **increase amount (and variety) of fruits and vegetables in your diet**. Fruits and vegetables are naturally low in calories and are good sources of many nutrients (like fiber and potassium) that many of us don't get enough of. Eating fruits and vegetables is associated with a reduced risk for many chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and certain types of cancer. Whole fresh fruits and vegetables are generally the best choice but canned, frozen, dried and even 100% juice can help you increase your intake.

Eating at least half of your grains as whole grains is the second key recommendation, and may be something you've heard before as well. Whole grains are great sources of fiber and have many vitamins and minerals that refined grains lack. Eating adequate whole grains is also associated with reduced risk for cardiovascular disease, though only about 5% of Americans consume the recommended 3 ounce-equivalents per day. Check the ingredients label on your food to make sure that a whole grain is the first ingredient on the list.

Milk and milk products are the third group of foods to increase. Note: this also includes soy 'milk' and similar beverages as they are fortified to be comparable to milk nutritionally. Consuming milk products is linked to improved bone health, reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, and lower blood pressure. The *guidelines* make sure to specify that lower-fat products are preferable when given the choice.

It is also suggested that we eat greater amounts of seafood (replacing other meat choices) and that we generally **increase the variety in our protein choices**. This includes eating more plant protein sources such as nuts and seeds. Lean forms of meat and poultry are emphasized, as the fats in these foods should be limited. The seafood recommendation, as with the others, is designed to reduce risk for cardiovascular disease.

These recommendations repeatedly stress the importance of **moderation and variety** within all food groups. Even the really great foods highlighted above have their limitations and consuming foods that vary in size, shape, and most importantly, color ensures that you are getting a good balance of the nutrients necessary for health.

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' *building healthy eating patterns* 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.