



Dietary Guidelines Part IV: Healthy Eating Patterns Guidelines: Eating Patterns

Recently I wrote about some of the general recommendations within the latest edition of *the Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Today's column, on *building healthy eating patterns*, is my fourth and final column in a series that is taking a closer look at some of the major pieces of the *guidelines* and what they mean to us.

This closing section of the *guidelines* pulls together all of the advice from the previous sections and offers a comprehensive approach to our food decisions. The authors present a few options for eating patterns that have been demonstrated to improve health and reduce risk for chronic disease. This certainly isn't meant to be a 'diet prescription', but should be viewed as some pretty flexible recommendations for lifelong choices that can accommodate a wide range of personal preferences and cultural and ethnic traditions.

A few specific eating patterns were identified as preferable to the current American diet. These are the *USDA Food Patterns* (including its vegetarian and vegan adaptations) and the *DASH* diet. There are a few minor differences, but overall these two patterns have many similarities. Most notably they recommend increased intake of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lowfat dairy and healthy oils and decreased intake of meat, solid fats, and added sugars. This should not be surprising as these are many of the specific recommendations from the previous chapters. Special mention was also given to Mediterranean eating patterns, which emphasize vegetables, fruits and nuts, olive oil, and whole grains.

While talk about changing the way you eat can be intimidating there are many good tools to help you break this task into more manageable pieces. One of these can be found on the internet at www.myplate.gov. The recently released MyPlate replaces the old food pyramid as the primary educational tool to help consumers make more positive food choices. MyPlate is simply a graphical representation of a plate that shows what proportions of the major food groups should be filling your plate. If you have not yet seen this I encourage you to get online and take a look—if most of your plates look pretty similar to the MyPlate guide then you can be confident that your larger eating patterns are probably on the right track.

Even small improvements in these areas of our diet on an individual- and population-scale have the potential to greatly improve the health of the nation. If you would like to learn more about the recommended dietary patterns 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.*