Eating is one of life's greatest pleasures. Since there are many foods and many ways to build a healthy diet and lifestyle, there is a lot of room for choice. The dietary guidelines are designed to help answer the question: "What should I eat to stay healthy?" They provide advice for healthy Americans over two years old about which food choices promote health and prevent disease. The following is a condensed list of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines may help with basic meal planning by providing key recommendations in seven main areas:

**Enjoy your food, but eat less**
- To prevent weight gain, make small decreases in food intake and increase your physical activity. To maintain weight, balance calories taken in with those expended.
- Eating more nutrient-dense foods is a good way to decrease caloric consumption. "Nutrient density" is determined by the amount of nutrients a food contains in comparison to its caloric content. Eating nutrient dense foods allows for sufficient vitamin and mineral intake while minimizing caloric intake. Kale is a very nutrient dense food as it contains moderate amounts of fiber, protein, thiamin, riboflavin, folate, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, vitamin K, vitamin B6, calcium, potassium, copper, and manganese. 1 oz (less than half a cup) contains 14 Calories (2 Calories from fat), 86% of the RDA for vitamin A, and 56% of the RDA for vitamin C (based on a 2000 Calorie diet). Contrarily, 1 oz of sugar cookies contains 134 Calories (52 Calories from fat) with virtually no vitamins, minerals, protein, or dietary fiber. Thus, sugar cookies are deemed "empty Calories."

**Avoid over-sized portions**
- Over-sized portions often lead to over-consumption of calories. Minimize this occurrence by measuring food portions before you eat. Comparing portions to everyday reference items such as a deck of cards (3 oz of meat) or your fist (1 cup of broccoli) will aid in appropriate approximations.

**Make half your plate fruits and vegetables**
- Consume adequate fruits and vegetables, while staying within energy needs. Two cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables per day are recommended for a reference daily intake of 2,000 calories with higher or lower amounts depending on the calorie level.
- Choose a variety of colors of fruits and vegetables each day. Each fruit/vegetable provides different micronutrients and fiber content.
- In the fruit group, consumption of whole fruits (fresh, frozen, canned, dried) rather than fruit juice for the majority of the total daily amount is suggested to ensure adequate fiber intake.

**Make at least half your grains whole grains**
- Whole grains are an important source of fiber and other nutrients.
- Consuming at least three or more ounce-equivalents of whole grains per day can reduce the risk of several chronic diseases and may help with weight maintenance.

**Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk**
- Consume three cups of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products every day.
- Low- or non-fat dairy products contain significantly fewer calories than whole milk, with no other significant differences in nutritional value. Making this switch is an easy way to cut back on calories.

**Monitor sodium intake**
- Consume less than 2,300 mg (approximately 1 tsp. of salt) of sodium per day.
- Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals – choose the foods with lower numbers
- High sodium intake has been linked to increased risk of hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and other chronic diseases.
Drink water instead of sugary drinks

- Sugary drinks contain calories, while plain water does not. These calories can easily add up to make your caloric intake exceed the calories you burn. Over time this will lead to weight gain.
- Sugary drinks often contain few vitamins or minerals and are therefore deemed “empty calories.”
- Aim for about 8 glasses of water per day. Although no explicit, quantifiable recommendation exists, staying hydrated is essential for optimal health. Most individuals consume sufficient water through their normal dietary habits to stay hydrated. Individuals in hot environments or participating in intense physical activity should be conscious of their hydration, drinking water purposefully.

Resources


2010 USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans is available online at: http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm

USDA myPlate web site: http://www.choosemyplate.gov. You can find up-to-date information on different foods groups, dietary recommendations for specific population groups, personalized meal plans, and more.

Reference