

2026-2030 Dietary Guidelines

Overview and Need to Know

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What Are the Dietary Guidelines for Americans?

- Official U.S. guidance updated every 5 years by law with an expert committee that reviews all of the latest science and then writes a summary, currently over 400 pages
- Basis for federal nutrition policy & programs (school meals, SNAP, WIC, military meals) [Dietary Guidelines](#)
- Latest edition released January 7, 2026



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What the Guidelines Can't Do

- They have not eliminated disease
- They can't make your dinner for you or do your gym workout
- They can't over-ride food marketing, economics, or politics
- But they can help you understand what matters most so you can make better choices



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What's New:
The "RealFood"
Approach

- Emphasizes *whole, real foods*
- Strong recommendations to avoid *ultra processed foods*
- Prioritize nutrient-dense eating patterns for health and prevention

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Key Nutritional
Recommendations

Guideline Highlights

- Eat vegetables & fruits throughout the day
- Prioritize high-quality protein and get enough per body weight
- Dairy with no added sugars
- Healthy fats from whole foods (e.g., nuts, eggs, olives)
- Limit added sugars, refined carbs, and highly processed foods
- Tailored guidance for lifecycle stages (infants to older adults) [USDA](#)

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These did not change

- 10% calories from sugar
- 10% calories from saturated fat, about 21 g or less for most people
- 2300 mg of sodium



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“Highly Processed” Foods

- **Definition & Advice**
 - Emphasis on avoiding packaged, ready-to-eat, salty/sweet processed foods
 - Prioritize home-prepared nutrient-dense choices

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What is the deal with food processing? Am I processing my food to make dinner?

Understanding the Levels of Food Processing



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Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs): Definition, Examples & Classifications



Ultra-processed foods are industrially formulated products made mostly from substances extracted from foods (such as oils, starches, sugars, and proteins) or synthesized in laboratories.



They typically contain **little to no whole food**, are designed for convenience and long shelf life, and often include **additives** to enhance flavor, texture, color, or preservation.



Common additives include:

Artificial flavors and colors
Emulsifiers, stabilizers, and thickeners
Preservatives and sweeteners
Flavor enhancers (e.g., "natural flavors")

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Group 1: Unprocessed or Minimally Processed Foods

- Foods altered only by basic processes like washing, chopping, freezing, or cooking.
 - Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables
 - Beans, lentils, whole grains
 - Eggs, plain milk, fresh meat, fish
 - Nuts and seeds



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Group 2: Processed Culinary Ingredients

- Substances extracted from whole foods and used in cooking. Use sparingly for flavoring and cooking.
 - Olive oil, butter
 - Sugar, honey
 - Salt
 - Vinegar



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Group 3: Processed Foods

- Whole foods combined with salt, sugar, or oil to preserve or enhance flavor. Read the label to minimize added salt and items high in saturated fat.
 - Canned vegetables with salt
 - Cheese
 - Fresh bread (few ingredients)
 - Canned fish



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Group 4: Ultra-Processed Foods

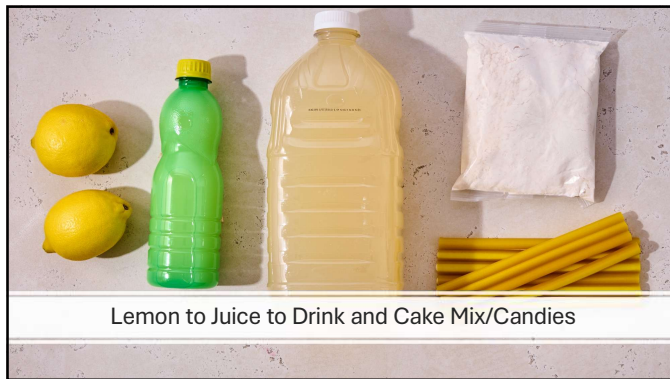
- Highly engineered products with multiple ingredients and additives; often ready-to-eat.
- **Examples:**
 - Sugary breakfast cereals
 - Soda and sweetened beverages
 - Packaged snack foods (chips, cookies, candy)
 - Fast food meals
 - Frozen entrées and microwave meals
 - Flavored yogurts with additives
 - Processed meats (hot dogs, chicken nuggets)

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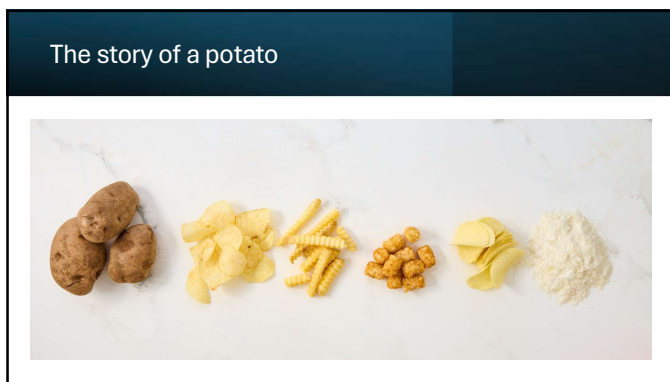
Why Ultra-Processed Foods Matter

- Tend to be **high in sodium, added sugars, and saturated fat**
- Typically **low in fiber and protective nutrients**
- Easy to overconsume due to hyper-palatability
- Higher intake is associated with increased risk of obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes
- The more ingredients you don't recognize—or couldn't use in a home kitchen—the more likely a food is **ultra-processed**.

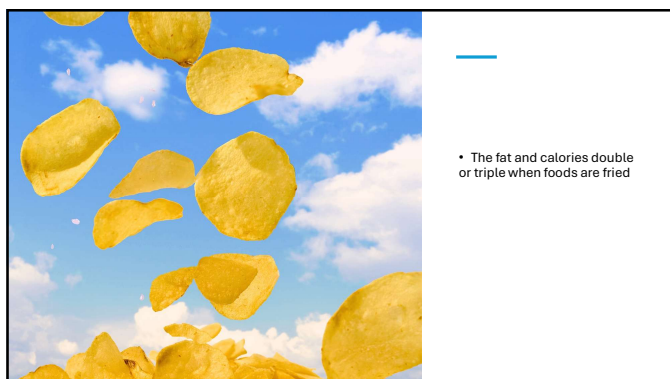
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55% of Calories From UPF

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), from August 2021 to August 2023, **about 55 % of total calories consumed by Americans aged 1 and older came from ultra-processed foods** — those industrially formulated products high in added sugars, sodium, and fats and low in whole-food content. Youth consumed even more (about 62 %), while adults consumed roughly 53 %. [CDC](#)

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Discussion

- Group 1 is the best choice
- Can be time consuming
- When are canned foods a good choice?
- How about frozen foods?
- What ultra processed foods are used in your facility?

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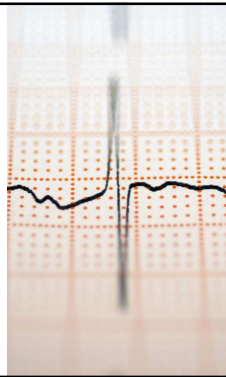
Obesity

- According to the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, **about 73.6 % of U.S. adults age 20 and older were classified as overweight or obese** (BMI $\geq$ 25) based on the 2017–2018 NHANES data — the most recent comprehensive survey for overweight prevalence. This means roughly three-quarters of American adults carry excess weight. [CDC](#)

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Heart Disease Still Number One Killer

- **Heart disease is the leading cause of death** both in the United States and worldwide. In the U.S., data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that heart disease ranks first among causes of death, with the most recent statistics indicating it causes more deaths annually than any other condition. In fact, in recent years, heart disease has accounted for more deaths than cancer and all other causes, underscoring its persistent impact on public health. [CDC+1](#)



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Groceries Are Up 25-30% Since the Pandemic

- **Over the past five years, food and grocery prices in the U.S. have gone up roughly 25%–30% overall** — meaning many families now pay significantly more for the same shopping cart of groceries than they did in 2019.
- Beef is priced between \$9 and \$23 per pound, according to research from the article's publication date.
- (USDA ERS, Instacart)



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Grains

- Whole grains are emphasized
- A serving of grains, often called an "ounce-equivalent," is typically about **1 slice of bread, 1 cup of dry cereal, or ½ cup of cooked rice/pasta/cereal**
- 2-4 servings per day



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Sources of Whole Grain

- Brainstorm together
 - Make a list of whole grains that you are currently serving.



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Fruits & Vegetables: Still at the Top

- **Key Message**
- Fruits and vegetables remain a top priority in healthy eating patterns
- They provide fiber, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and protective plant compounds
- Despite long-standing guidance, **most Americans still do not eat enough**



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Fruits and Vegetables Reality

- Nearly **90% of Americans do not meet vegetable recommendations**
- About **80% do not meet fruit recommendations**
- Low intake is linked to higher risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers

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Bottom Line

- Filling half the plate with fruits and vegetables remains one of the most effective, evidence-based strategies for improving diet quality and overall health
- Healthy Plate – same as MyPlate



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Vegetables

Serving = 1 cup or
2 cups of leafy greens

3 servings per day



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Fruit

Serving = 1 cup raw or
½ cup dried

2 servings per day



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Protein

- Most Americans are getting the required amount (80 g) even with the increase
- But they do not get enough **variety in protein to include seafood and plant-based options**
- Healthy fats emphasized from whole foods but you have to keep saturated fat below 10% of calories
- Servings = 3 oz cooked meat, poultry or seafood; 1 egg; ½ c beans or lentils; 1 oz nuts or nut butter; 3 oz soy
- 3-4 servings per day



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Dairy

Servings =
1 cup milk;
¾ c. yogurt;
1 oz cheese

3 servings a day
recommended



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CMS Memo: QSSAM-26-03-Hospital/CAH

- Limit ultra-processed food options for patients.
- Elimination of sugar-sweetened beverages unless clinically appropriate in limited scenarios.
- Elimination of refined grains and replacing them with 100% whole grains.
- Prioritize minimally processed protein sources, including plant-based options.
- Emphasize baked, broiled, roasted, stir-fried, or grilled vegetables and proteins and eliminate deep fried cooking methods.
- Eliminated processed meats and high in added sugars, sodium, and artificial additives.
- Ensure meals contain less than 10 grams of added sugar, unless clinically appropriate.

The New Pyramid



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Sources of Added Sugars Activity

- Brainstorm together
 - Make a list of foods that have added sugars you are currently serving.



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CMS – No Guidance for SNF, LTC, AL, MC Yet

- In preparation, please share something that would need to change in your facility?
- What are the benefits?
- What are the hurdles?



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Questions?

Thank you for watching!