New Dietary Guidelines Reviewed: Science, Controversy and Practical Takeaways Transcript

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Introduction to the nutrition guidelines debate

Welcome to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr. Amy Coopersmith, a doctorate-prepared nurse practitioner, and this show is about empowering you to live a radiant, healthy, and balanced life.

So health-related headlines are everywhere right now. Nutrition guidelines, vaccine policy, public health recommendations. And they're often delivered in ways that create more confusion than clarity.

Health policy has become emotional, political, and deeply personal. These topics matter because they directly influence how we eat, how we care for our bodies, and the medical decisions we're asked to make.

Nutrition is one of my favorite topics. I've been studying nutrition for most of my career. I've read books and studies and heard so many opposing points of view.

I form my opinions based on what I've read. but more importantly on what I've seen, both in my own experience and with my clients. My opinions have evolved over the years and I'm always open to new opinions, especially when they are evidence-based.

However, as we will talk about today, there is a lot of conflicting information out there. So in today's episode, we're gonna talk about the new nutrition guidelines.

I'll do my best to present both sides of the conversation as well as give my own opinion. I really want to encourage you to make informed decisions that are best for you.

And remember, this conversation is for educational purposes and should not be considered medical advice. So what are the new guidelines? The Dietary Guidelines for Americans is a document that advises people on how to eat healthily, and it also frames federal nutrition policy.

Eat real food and avoid ultra-processed foods

Every five years, a group of experts convene to systematically go over the evidence and make recommendations for how the US Departments of Agriculture and the Health and Human Services should update federal dietary guidelines.

This group is called the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, It's a 20 person committee of experts who volunteer two years of their time to make these recommendations.

The committee makes the recommendations and then the departments issued the guidelines. But this time around, the committee's report was rejected by the administration.

And instead, a supplemental scientific analysis was conducted by another group of experts. These experts have assured that the evidence they used was based solely on science and research, and it underwent a peer review.

However, some critics have raised concern over possible conflict of interest and maybe financial ties specifically to the beef and dairy industry. So the 2025-2030 dietary guidelines emphasize whole foods.

nutrient density, reducing added sugars, and avoiding ultra processed foods. They also recommend having protein at every meal and having healthy fats from sources like meat, dairy, nuts, and seeds.

The visual is now in inverted pyramid with protein, dairy, healthy fats at the top, which is the base, and they have grains at the bottom. And they're shifting focus from grains to whole real foods.

And at first I thought, well, that's what I recommend to people, so it's pretty cool. Then the backlash occurred. We had headlines, we had accusations.

We're so politically divided right now that it's no surprise that people are upset. So now the recommendations were condensed to a 10-page document, though the whole report is available online.

we're gonna go through the main bullet points and discuss the pros and cons of each and hopefully have a great conversation. So these guidelines are available, very easy to find on the internet and you can download them.

So the first one, I'm gonna start with eat real food. Limit highly processed foods, avoid added sugars and refined carbohydrates. We wanna avoid artificial flavors, petroleum-based dyes, artificial preservatives.

We want to avoid sugar sweetened beverages. And they say that no amount of added sugar is good, but they really want adults to limit that. And they want children to almost eliminate the added sugars.

So support for this, there's strong observational data that links ultra processed foods to higher rates of obesity, type two diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and all cause mortality.

Real food tends to be more nutrient-dense, fiber-rich, and satisfying. There are fewer additives, fewer industrial oils, and so that's gonna hopefully reduce gut inflammation and overall body inflammation.

Now, opposition to this, some critics say that the term ultra-processed is poorly defined and overly broad. They also argue that some fortified foods improve nutrient intake, like folate in grains or iodine in salt.

And there are also some accessibility and affordability concerns that real food might not be an option for some populations. So my opinion, eat real food.

The packaged stuff is probably not good for you. And as far as accessibility goes, I used to work at the health department. Pediatric obesity was the focus of my doctorate.

And I worked a lot with low income families on how to improve healthy eating for the family. So a concern I heard a lot is healthy food is more expensive.

But what I found is it's the packaged healthy food that was very expensive. Real fruits and vegetables tend not to be that expensive. I really find for myself and for my clients.

You can buy a bag of frozen vegetables very affordably.

Portion awareness and hydration

And I did work with the families and we focused on projects looking at barriers to healthy eating, but that definitely was one of them. So also while I was at the health department, I conducted a SNAP challenge, right?

I challenged everyone to develop a meal plan for a family of four using a SNAP budget. So the money that somebody on those benefits would get. So I was able to do that, but it took a lot of planning, shopping at the farmer's market, buying things that were on sale at the supermarket.

But a significant barrier for low-income families, and any family really, can be lack of time to plan that carefully. So I really would like to see programs that improve guidance for healthy eating on a budget, which I think could make this guideline more accessible to everyone.

Okay, now the next one. eat the right amount for you. So pay attention to portion sizes and also hydration is a key

factor for overall health. So eat the right amount for you.

Support portion awareness helps prevent chronic over consumption. Caloric excess is clearly associated with obesity and metabolic disease. Opposition on that, focusing on the amount can make somebody ignore the food quality.

Calorie counting can worsen disordered eating. And everyone's different, so metabolism is adaptive. So my opinion, portion control is good. These guidelines don't really expand on how much is good.

And that's where individual variance will come to play.

Protein at every meal

It's very difficult to give someone an exact number to shoot for. And there also is more evidence about undereating and chronic calorie restriction that negatively can affect metabolism long term.

Also active people may need to eat more to support their efforts. And so I think this is a very individualized guideline and really trial and error a lot of times comes into play for people.

Now hydration should be mostly from water, which is great. We want to avoid sweetened beverages. So I like that one. So the next one, prioritize protein at every meal.

We want to consume a variety of protein foods from animal sources, eggs, protein, poultry, and seafood, and red meat, as well as a variety of plant-based protein foods, including beans, peas, lentils, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

So the support for this protein supports muscle mass, metabolic health, immune function, and satiety. It's especially important with aging. Higher protein intake is associated with improved body composition and reduced sarcopenia.

So sarcopenia is that muscle loss that naturally occurs with aging. It also can help stabilize blood sugar and reduce cravings. So the opposition to this, some experts worry about excessive protein, especially when people have under-functioning kidneys.

They say Americans were already getting enough protein and we don't need these added guidelines. There are some environmental and ethical concerns around animal protein sources.

And while the guideline mentions plant-based protein sources, the graphic very clearly critics feel influence people to choose the animal sources. So the meat is really big and largely depicted where the beans are really little.

So yours is bigger than mine basically. Now the guidelines don't specifically reference processed meat, but they do say to consume meat with no added sugars or refined carbohydrates.

There was another well-known expert that talked about the industry maybe using this guideline for not nefarious purposes, but to add other sources of protein to a packaged item and say that it's healthy.

That's something that we really need to watch for because that's not what the guidelines are talking about. They're talking about eating real food, not packaged food with an added protein in it.

So my opinion, I love protein. I've shared that I learned the hard way that in college when I didn't consume enough protein, I gained weight, I didn't feel well.

Full-fat dairy

I personally feel much better when I get those 30 grams of protein with most of my meals. I recommend this for most of my clients, especially when they're trying to lose weight.

And we've talked before about the challenges of weight loss and in order to avoid losing muscle on your weight loss journey, we have to get adequate protein.

So next, Consume dairy. Our dairy choices should include full fat dairy with no added sugars. So the support for this. Dairy provides calcium, protein, potassium and other bioavailable nutrients.

Fermented dairy like yogurt and kefir may support gut health and metabolic health. So the concerns. People are concerned about the saturated fat content in full fat milk.

previous guidelines and the recommendations from the first committee are for low fat dairy. So this is the first time we've actually been encouraged to consume full fat dairy.

So there is concern that let's say you're drinking a glass of milk that's full fat, it's going to be higher in calories maybe than the other version. So my opinion.

I tend to limit dairy consumption. So full disclosure, I don't like milk. I don't like the taste of it. So I avoid it for that reason. But when I was a kid, I didn't like it.

I had to drink it, so I did. But I do think a little bit of Greek yogurt is good. In fact, I have that every day. I think small amounts of cheese can be OK.

But when I say that, I mean the real cheese, not the stuff in the bag. Because if you look closely at that, It says cheese product, it's not actual cheese.

So you don't want that. I do think that most humans don't need to drink milk after a certain age. So when we do choose dairy though, it should be full fat.

And here's why. When you remove the fat from the dairy products, it has to be replaced with something else. So the taste and texture is gonna change when that fat is taken out.

So the manufacturers are going to have to add carbohydrates, lactose, sugars, starch-based thickeners, stabilizers, and emulsifiers. So basically a bunch of crap is going into the dairy when the fat is removed.

So as a result, many of these low-fat or fat-free products actually contain higher carbohydrate loads than they did originally.

Vegetables, fruit, and juice

And their ingredient list is going to be very long, so filled with stuff that you don't want. It also could cause blood sugar spikes And when your blood sugar spikes, then your body has to release insulin, which again is gonna cause you to store fat.

So I think we need to use dairy conservatively, but when we do, it should be full fat. Next, eat vegetables and fruit. We need to eat a variety of colorful, nutrient-dense vegetables and fruits.

They should be in their original form. If we drink juice, that should be 100%. fruit or vegetable juice. Now support for this. Vegetables and fruit are high in fiber, antioxidants, polyphenols, vitamins and minerals.

They're associated with a lower risk of chronic disease and improved gut health. They can also support immune function and metabolic resilience. So very little opposition to this one, thankfully.

Some individuals struggle with gut disorders and they can't eat inflammatory vegetables Sometimes fruit intake can affect glycemic control. So my opinion, eat vegetables and eat a lot of them.

I like people to get their healthy carbs from starchy vegetables, like sweet potatoes and squash. If someone is

trying to lose weight, I tend to limit fruit to no more than two servings a day.

Some people are a little more sensitive to that than others. And there are some types of fruit that are more likely to raise blood sugar, and we need to be more careful with them.

But it's also loaded with fiber and nutrients, so a little bit is good for you. Now, as for juice, feel like when we take the juice from the actual fruit, it's just we're getting too much.

To make a cup of orange juice, it takes three or four oranges, and we would never eat that in a setting. So I like to limit juice for most people. Now we're going to pause for a break from our sponsor.

You're listening to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. Don't go anywhere. We'll be right back.

Healthy fats, saturated fat, and seed oils

Welcome back to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr. Amy Coopersmith. Before the break, we were talking about the new dietary guidelines. We talked about each bullet item.

We've been discussing the support for each guideline and also the criticism. And I've been giving my two cents as well. Where we left off, the next guideline is incorporate healthy fats.

So you wanna use things like olive oil, butter or beef tallow when you're cooking your foods. The saturated fat recommendations are still less than 10% and we want to limit highly processed foods.

So support for eating healthy fats. Fats support hormone production, vitamin absorption and cell membrane and improve satiety so we get fuller faster.

And if we're replacing refined carbohydrates with healthy fats, it's associated with improved metabolic markers. So opposition, there is an ongoing debate around saturated fat and what it does to your heart.

So the guidelines still recommend less than 10% of your total calories from fat, but critics worry that if people eat the animal products the way they're encouraged to, that their fat content is going to be above that 10%. So now the original committee recommendations were to limit red meat and processed meat, and it lumped those together.

So the problem I have with that is red meat and processed meat don't function the same way in the body. So I really think that the research needs to separate those two items if we're going to take those recommendations.

There's concern that healthy fat messaging will lead to caloric excess. So my opinion, healthy fat is good. I think we should get most of it from nuts and avocado and olives.

And we mentioned the difference between red meat and processed meat. So now, why is saturated fat so controversial? People are really upset about this.

So I scoured the research and of course I found conflicting studies. So for example, there was a large meta-analysis published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition and they found that dietary saturated fat intake was not associated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease or overall cardiovascular disease.

They studied 350,000 adults for 23 years and really didn't find significant differences in those who ate the fat and those who didn't. There are others who say the health effects of the saturated fat depend on the food source.

Where is it coming from? Is it coming from trans fats? And I don't think any of these guidelines addressed trans fat. Now another very popular advocate for plant-based eating, Dr.

Michael Greger, who also has a documentary coming out on how plant-based eating can reverse cardiovascular disease. So it's no surprise that he opposes this recommendation.

So he argues that saturated fat does directly contribute to cardiovascular disease by raising your bad cholesterol, that LDL. So he feels that this is really a modifiable risk factor and that people should not be eating more meat.

And the opposite is true. There's some evidence that some people will experience higher cholesterol when they eat fat. And then some people won't. So now the question is, when your cholesterol goes up, is that what is causing the heart disease?

And there's debate on that as well. There are some that feel that it's not the number itself that is causing the disease, but it's inflammation. So again, I think it depends on where the fat is sourced from and how the body responds to it.

So we're gonna follow back in a different episode on saturated fat because I think it warrants more discussion. So now they recommended butter in the recommendations.

And so this has been getting some bad comments as well. So the reason they recommend butter is because they want you to use that for your cooking instead of seed oil.

So we've talked on the show about seed oils and how they're a very refined oil. And that's seed oils are soybean, corn, canola, sunflower. They're very highly processed and rich in omega-6 fatty acids.

When consumed in excess, especially a lot of your ultra processed foods, those things in packages, they're gonna contain a lot of these types of oils and they can be very inflammatory.

Also, if you're using these for cooking and you make them at high heat, they're more likely to cause oxidation and damage to your food. So butter on the other hand is minimally processed.

Whole grains and alcohol limits

It's very stable. So you can use it with cooking and it's less prone to oxidation. So the advocates argue that when used in moderation, it may very well be a better option than the seed oils.

So that said, it's still very much a debated topic. Critics point out that butter contains saturated fat. Saturated fat raises cholesterol. And once again, the takeaway really shouldn't be that one fat is universally good or bad.

But I think, again, we need to follow back on this really do a deeper dive into the research. Okay, the next guideline, focus on whole grains. We wanna reduce the consumption of highly processed refined carbohydrates.

Okay, so support for this. Whole grains provide fiber, B vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals. Observational data links whole grain intake with reduced cardiovascular and diabetes risk.

And fiber supports gut microbiome diversity. Now opposition, not all whole grains are created equal and many can be highly processed. Some people have gluten sensitivity and autoimmune conditions and they should not be having gluten at all.

Some individuals experience better glycemic control without the grains. And there's opposition to the graphic. The grains are at the way bottom and it's depicted in a very small part of the picture.

So some people think that it's gonna cost people to limit grains more than they should. So my opinion, for a long time, I advise people to limit grains.

Now there has been emerging research on older individuals and athletes actually indicating more of a need for carbohydrate than perhaps we once thought.

I do still prefer vegetable sources for carbohydrate like we mentioned before, but a little bit of healthy grains is okay for some people. Now there is some individual variance here.

I do find that my clients who struggle with weight tend to be more carb sensitive and they may need to limit the amount of grains they eat. So even though the guidelines say two to four servings of grains per day, for some people that might be too much.

So I just think we need to proceed with caution with that. Now the next one, limit alcoholic beverages. So it just says consume less alcohol, whereas previous guidelines had a specific number of drinks that were safe or safer.

So support for this guideline, alcohol has become a known health risk. There's strong evidence that link alcohol to increased risk of breast cancer, liver disease, high blood pressure, and certain gastrointestinal cancers.

So even low to moderate intake has been associated with cancer risk, especially in women. So people that like this guideline feel like it's more clear, I'm just saying limit it.

They also feel that it encourages individualized decision making. The critics, they think it lacks specificity and that creates confusion. So they like the more one to two drinks.

They feel that maybe there's some industry influence that influences guideline. Now I recently listened to a podcast where the speaker repeatedly referred to alcohol as poison.

He stated that the only thing worse for us was heroin. He strongly feels that no alcohol is safe or should be consumed by anyone. And he cited a lot of research that shows alcohol to be very inflammatory, particularly to the brain and the gut.

Politics, trust, and closing thoughts

There was a federal report released in January of 2025 that suggested even one daily drink could increase the risk of liver cirrhosis, esophageal cancer, and oral cancer.

And they even called for a cancer warning label on the alcoholic beverages. So my opinion, there's more and more evidence showing that alcohol can be harmful.

And this hurts me to say because I like wine. But alcohol is shown to be inflammatory as we said, and it's also a source of empty calories. So I find it can be the main saboteur for people trying to lose weight.

It also affects your inhibitions. So sometimes people are more likely to overeat. when they consume alcohol. So I feel like the society is becoming more aware of that, and that's why there are more alcohol-free types of beverages in there.

So I want to talk just for a moment about politics, and why are politics involved with our nutrition guidelines? So this isn't new, unfortunately. From the very beginning, the US nutrition guidelines have been shaped not just by science, but by economics, politics, and food supply realities.

So during World War I, nutrition guidance was actually heavily influenced by rationing and food conservation. So they were encouraging Americans to eat less meat, less sugar, and less wheat, not necessarily for their health, but so that they could support troops overseas and keep people as healthy as possible during that time.

So then the war ended and industry shifted, and the grain industry became involved in our guidelines. I remember not long ago, we were being encouraged to have 11 servings of grains a day.

So now, of course, the beef and dairy industry is involved. And unfortunately, it just makes people not trust the recommendations. So now supportive voices for these guidelines, they do feel it's more consumer friendly, given its shorter length, it's easy to follow.

I feel that while clinical research needs to be done, it's imperative for medical decision making. Many of these nutritional studies are conflicting each other, and that can be due to bias, industry influence, insufficient funding.

Sometimes these studies are really small, which can disrupt their data. So now, historically, research shows that most Americans don't follow the guidelines anyway.

So why are we so upset about this? Well, it does matter. These guidelines can influence health care advice from practitioners, school lunch menus, and nutrition labeling.

So as always, no single guideline does fit everyone. What you decide should reflect your personal health goals and what you believe. Do your research, decide what makes the most sense for you.

And because we've identified more questions than perhaps answers in this episode, we're going to follow up with a specific question and answer segment.

So send me your questions. What do you want to know? Send me an email to radiantpodcasts2025 at gmail.com. And I'll find more experts with differing opinions so we can further this discussion.

So thanks to our listeners for tuning in to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'll be back next Saturday morning with Dr. Sheila Patel. We're gonna talk about stress in the media, which I think can be very relevant to today's topic as well.

Check out past episodes on Amethyst Wellness YouTube. And we're now featured on Apple Podcasts and all your favorite platforms. So until next time, stay healthy and here's to your best life.