

# From the Nutritionist

Andrea Hart, RDN, CDN



## New Dietary Guidelines

Nutrition advice can be confusing. One day we're told to eat a low-fat diet, the next we're told to eat more healthy fats. One minute we're supposed to limit our intake of egg yolks, the next they're fine. Some recommend eating a lot of protein, others say we should limit our intake. This kind of conflicting advice causes some people to distrust nutrition experts. It's important to remember, though, that nutrition is a science. As medical and nutrition scientists conduct research, they find new evidence that may not agree with previous beliefs. New technology allows discoveries that couldn't be made in the past. As the new evidence adds up, nutrition recommendations may change to reflect the research. Although

confusing at times, it's worthwhile to pay attention to this kind of evidence-based nutrition advice, instead of jumping on every fad diet that comes around. Fad diets aren't based on science, most don't work as promised, and some can actually be harmful to your health.

One source of evidence-based nutrition advice is the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These are updated every five years to reflect medical and nutritional research. In January 2016, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which provides recommendations to help Americans adopt healthier eating patterns. The Dietary Guidelines recognize that healthy eating patterns are adaptable and can be tailored based on personal, cultural, and traditional preferences.

Healthy eating patterns include a variety of nutritious foods like vegetables, fruits, grains, low-fat and fat-free dairy, lean meats and other protein foods and oils. They limit saturated fats, added sugars, and sodium. The Guidelines provide three examples of healthy eating patterns:

- **Healthy U.S.-Style:** Based on a 2,000-calorie diet, people following the Healthy U.S.-Style eating pattern consume 2.5 cups of vegetables, 2 cups of fruit, 6 ounces of grain, 3 cups of dairy, and 5.5 ounces of protein each day.
- **Healthy Mediterranean:** Compared with the Healthy U.S.-Style eating pattern, the Healthy Mediterranean eating pattern includes more protein and fruits and less dairy. People following the Mediterranean pattern who consume 2,000 calories a day get 6.5 ounces of protein, 2.5 cups of fruit and 2 cups of dairy. The Mediterranean and U.S.-Style patterns both suggest 2.5 cups of vegetables and 6 ounces of grain per day.
- **Healthy Vegetarian:** Compared to the Healthy U.S.-Style eating pattern, the Healthy Vegetarian eating pattern includes more legumes (beans and peas), soy products, nuts and seeds, and whole grains. It contains no meats, poultry, or seafood, and only recommends 3.5 ounces a day of protein for a 2,000-calorie diet – which still meets the recommended daily amount.

*Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York state-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.*