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monthly nutrigram

New Guidelines for a Healthier U.S.

Uncle Sam cares about your health - so much so that every five years various government agencies come together to publish new guidelines to help Americans improve their nutrition and exercise habits. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are based on the latest scientific findings and are designed to reduce rates of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, certain cancers, and osteoporosis. The 2005 guidelines are hot off the presses, and they are a bit more ambitious than the 2000 edition – but the basic themes will look familiar.

Not surprisingly, the guidelines encourage Americans to eat fewer calories, make healthier food choices, and exercise more. But there are also some new twists on old themes. Here's a rundown of the nine major areas the recommendations cover:

- **Get the right nutrients, but watch the calories!** Nutrients in the spotlight include vitamin B12 and vitamin D. People over the age of 50 are encouraged to get vitamin B12 in its synthetic form such as a multivitamin (the synthetic form is better absorbed!). Older adults, people with dark skin tones, and people who do not get enough sunlight to make vitamin D should get extra amounts of this very important nutrient from fortified foods and supplements.
- **Manage weight.** For many Americans, this means lose weight. But it also means avoid weight gain over time.
- **Get a lot of physical activity.** The recommendations recognize that physical activity is not only important for physical health but also for psychological well-being. How much is enough? The guidelines recommend 60 minutes on most days of the week with an extra 30 minutes thrown in if you are trying to lose weight.
- **Eat a lot of fruits and vegetables:** A minimum of 2 ½ cups per day is recommended.
- **Reduce bad fats.** That means saturated fats **and** trans fats. Trans fats will show up on all labels (it's the law) by 2006, which should help consumers meet this goal.
- **Choose good carbohydrates.** When it comes to grains and other high carb foods, keep it whole and high fiber! Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains should comprise most of your high carb choices.
- **More potassium, less sodium.** Potassium is abundant in fruits and vegetables and seems to help keep blood pressure at bay. Sodium is an arch nemesis of blood pressure control but not always easy to avoid. Read labels and try to keep your sodium intake to 2300 mg or less per day.
- **Moderate Alcohol.** Moderation means the equivalent of 1 alcoholic beverage per day for women and 2 for men.
- **Practice Food Safety.** Avoid the agony of food poisoning by safe food prep practices such as frequent hand washings, cooking to proper temperatures, keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold, and buying pasteurized milk and juices.

To get more information in greater detail, go to: <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/pdf/brochure.pdf>

Source: *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005*. Executive Summary. United States Department of Health and Human Services & the United States Department of Agriculture