

AICR's Federal Priorities: Evidence-Based Dietary Guidelines

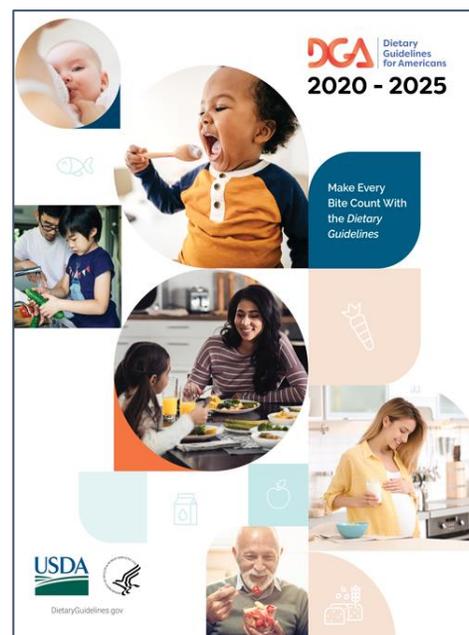
Introduction

Every five years, the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and of Agriculture (USDA) produce the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans \(DGA\)](#), a report containing evidence-based nutritional and dietary information and recommendations. The *Guidelines* not only serve as a basis for what Americans should generally eat and feed their families, but they also provide the foundation for all federal food and nutrition policy programs. Federal food and nutrition programs, such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed), are required to align with the DGA, impacting the millions of Americans who participate in these programs. The DGA also function as a resource for state food and nutrition programs, private sector and nonprofit organizations, health professionals, and the public to help people lead healthful lifestyles.

As the leading authority on cancer prevention and survival through diet, weight and physical activity, the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) advocates that the DGA reflect the evidence on the connection between dietary patterns, alcohol use, and cancer risk.

The current [2020-2025 DGA](#) emphasizes a healthy eating pattern, or combination of foods and beverages consumed over time, that includes vegetables, fruits, whole grains and lean meats. This aligns with [AICR's recommendations](#) to eat a diet rich in whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and beans, and low in red and processed meats and sugar-sweetened drinks. The 2020-2025 *Guidelines* also recommend limiting sodium, saturated and trans fats and added sugars,¹ aligning with AICR's recommendation to limit consumption of 'fast foods' and other processed foods that are high in fats, starches, or sugars.

While the 2020-2025 DGA largely reflects the evidence on cancer risk reduction, the DGA guideline on alcohol consumption does not fully reflect the evidence on the connection between alcohol intake and health outcomes, including cancer risk. Based on [strong evidence](#) linking alcohol consumption to six different types of cancer, AICR recommends that it is best not to drink alcohol for cancer prevention. However, in its report to HHS and the USDA, the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) – an independent committee of scientific experts tasked with reviewing the research to inform the DGA - concluded that “no evidence exists to relax current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommendations, and there is evidence to tighten them for men such that recommended limits for both men and women who



Source:

<https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/resources/2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-online-materials>

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at [DietaryGuidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov).

drink would be 1 drink per day on days when alcohol is consumed.”² However, this finding was not reflected in the 2020-2025 DGA.

The DGA Update Process

The USDA and HHS engage in a [five-step process](#) to update the DGA: 1) identify the scientific questions for review by the DGAC; 2) appoint the DGAC; 3) review the DGAC’s scientific report; 4) develop the DGA policy report; and 5) implement the DGA.³ Each step in the process provides opportunity for public input. Throughout the development of the 2020-2025 *Guidelines*, AICR provided [comments](#) on the evidence connecting dietary patterns, alcohol consumption, and cancer risk and recommendations for improving the process to include consideration of a broader range of high-quality evidence, such as from AICR’s Continuous Update Project (CUP) reports, and increased transparency.

The DGA 2025-2030 update is underway, and AICR is once again monitoring and [informing](#) the process. AICR will continue to provide evidence regarding the diet and cancer connection and recommend that the DGA follow the latest cancer prevention research. In addition, given that adherence to evidence-based dietary guidance is low across the population,⁴ AICR provides numerous [educational tools](#) to help people more easily understand their nutritional needs and how those needs can be met through eating a healthful diet.

Key Recommendations

AICR recognizes the importance of the DGA in supporting a healthful diet for prevention of cancer and other chronic conditions. As such, we recommend that the DGA:

1. Reflect the most up-to-date evidence on dietary patterns and cancer risk as described in AICR’s [Continuous Update Project](#) (CUP) reports.
2. Provide guidance to limit intake of [alcohol](#) and red and [processed meats](#) and increase the proportion of grains that are [whole grains](#), given the established evidence on the relationship between these dietary components and cancer risk.
3. Utilize its in development process systematic reviews and meta-analyses from authoritative experts outside of the federal government, such as the evidence provided in [Diet, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer: a Global Perspective](#), AICR and World Cancer Research Fund’s Third Expert Report, and its CUP reports that contain the most authoritative scientific research on cancer prevention and survivorship to date.⁵
4. Be developed using a transparent, public process and free from industry influence.

For more information about AICR’s federal policy priorities and how you can get involved, please visit <https://www.aicr.org/impact/policy-advocacy> or contact advocacy@aicr.org.

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² Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. 2020. Scientific Report of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee: Advisory Report to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and Human Services. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Washington, DC.

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Work Under Way: Learn about the Process*. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/work-under-way/learn-about-process>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. *Diet, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer: a Global Perspective*. Continuous Update Project Expert Report 2018. Available at dietandcancerreport.org.