

2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans: A Comprehensive Guidance Document for Tennessee Extension Professionals

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Executive Summary and Overview

On January 7, 2026, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines represent the most significant update to federal nutrition policy in decades, with a core message articulated by HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.: “Eat real food.”

The new guidelines prioritize whole, nutrient-dense foods while explicitly naming and recommending avoidance of highly processed foods for the first time in federal dietary guidance history.

Key changes include nearly doubling protein recommendations, endorsing full-fat dairy products and taking a harder stance on added sugars and refined carbohydrates.

The guidelines can be accessed at [realfood.gov](https://www.realfood.gov).

Part 1: Key Changes in the 2025-2030 Guidelines

Previous Recommendation	New Recommendations
0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight (approximately 54 grams daily for a 150-pound person)	1.2 to 1.6 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight (approximately 82-109 grams daily for a 150-pound person)

1.1 Protein: The Most Significant Numerical Change

This represents nearly a 100 percent increase in recommended protein intake. The rationale behind this significant change reflects updated nutrition science: the 0.8-gram figure represented the bare minimum needed to prevent deficiency, not the optimal amount for health. Higher protein intake may help support:

- Muscle maintenance, particularly important as we age
- Improved satiety and weight management
- Displacement of less nutritious foods from the diet, particularly refined carbohydrates

The guidelines emphasize diverse protein sources, including eggs, poultry, seafood, red meat, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds and soy, including high quality animal-based proteins as well as plant-based proteins.

Previous Recommendation	New Recommendations
Low-fat and fat-free dairy products as the preferred choice	Full-fat dairy with no added sugars, recommending 3 servings per day on a 2,000-calorie diet

1.2 Full-Fat Dairy: Reversal of Decades of Guidance

This represents a significant shift in federal guidance. For decades, official recommendations pushed Americans toward low-fat products based on previous research that saturated fat was harmful.

The guidelines maintain that saturated fat should remain below 10 percent of daily calories overall, but full-fat dairy is no longer discouraged as a category. The greater satiety from full-fat products means consumers may naturally eat less of other foods.

Young children should limit high fat milk intake to 16oz per day. High intake of milk in children can lead to iron deficiency

1.3 Added Sugars: No Amount Recommended

Previous Recommendation	New Recommendations
Limit added sugars to less than 10 percent of daily calories	No amount of added sugars or non-nutritive sweeteners is recommended or considered part of a healthy or nutritious diet

This represents a dramatic shift. Rather than treating sugar as something to moderate, the new guidance frames it as something to eliminate the diet entirely. Specific recommendations include:

- No single meal should contain more than 10 grams of added sugar (approximately 2 teaspoons)
- Children under age 4 should have no added sugars at all

For context, the CDC reports that the average American currently consumes approximately 17 teaspoons of added sugar per day—far exceeding these new targets.

Fruits have natural sugars and fiber that are beneficial for a healthy lifestyle. Natural sugars from fruit should not be confused with added sugars in foods.

1.4 Highly Processed Foods: Named and Explicitly Avoided

Previous Recommendation	New Recommendations
No guidance on ultra processed foods	Avoid highly processed packaged, prepared, ready-to-eat or other foods that are salty or sweet, such as chips, cookies and candy. Avoid sugar-sweetened beverages, such as soda, fruit drinks and energy drinks

For the first time in the history of federal dietary guidance, ultra processed foods are specifically named and recommended for avoidance.

This explicit language marks a significant departure from previous editions, which used vague terminology such as “limiting” in certain categories.

Previous Recommendation	New Recommendations
MyPlate, which depicted a divided dinner plate and was the official USDA visual since 2011, has been replaced by an inverted food pyramid. This represents the conceptual return of the pyramid structure after 15 years	The New Pyramid Structure: • Top/Widest section (equal visual weight): Protein, Dairy and Healthy Fats • Vegetables and Fruits • Bottom/Narrowest section: Whole Grains

1.5 The New Food Pyramid Visual

This visual hierarchy communicates that meals should be built around protein and produce, with healthy fats and dairy as supporting players, while whole grains serve a complementary rather than foundational role.

Part 2: What Remained Consistent

Despite significant headlines about changes, many fundamental dietary recommendations continue from previous guidelines:

2.1 Fruits and Vegetables

The guidelines continue to emphasize five servings of fruits and vegetables daily, with an emphasis on whole fruits and vegetables rather than juices or processed versions.

2.2 Whole Grains

Two to four servings of whole grains remain part of the recommended pattern daily. The change is primarily one of emphasis—grains are now positioned as a supporting player rather than the foundation of the diet, a significant shift from the era when grains formed the base of the previous food pyramid.

2.3 Saturated Fat and Sodium Limits

Saturated fat should remain below 10 percent of daily calories (unchanged).

Sodium intake continues to be monitored, though the new guidelines now note that sodium and electrolytes are essential for hydration, adding important nuances to recommendations.

2.4 Hydration and Alcohol

Water and unsweetened beverages remain the recommended hydration sources.

Alcohol recommendations have been simplified from specific drink limits (one per day for women, two for men) to a more general message: “consume less alcohol for better health.”

Part 3: Comparison Table — 2020-2025 vs. 2025-2030 Guidelines

Dairy Component	2020-2025 Guidelines	2025-2030 Guidelines
Protein Recommendation	0.8 g/kg body weight	1.2 - 1.6 g/kg body weight
150-lb Person Daily Protein	~54 grams	~82-109 grams
Dairy Fat Content	Low-fat/fat-free preferred	Full fat with no added sugar
Dairy Servings	2-3 per day	3 per day (2,000 cal diet)
Added Sugar Limit	<10% daily calories	No amount recommended
Single Meal Sugar Limit	Not specified	<10 grams
Ultra processed Foods	Vaguely mentioned	Explicitly named and avoided
Visual Guide	MyPlate (2011-2026)	Inverted Food Pyramid
Grains Position	Base/foundation	Supporting component
Protein Position	Complementary	Central/primary

*Individual meals should not exceed 10 grams; no amount is considered healthy or necessary.

Part 4: Frequently Asked Questions About the New Guidelines

Q1: Why did protein recommendations nearly double?

A: The previous 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight recommendation represented the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA)—essentially the minimum needed to prevent protein deficiency, not the optimal amount for health. Some new research may indicate that moderate increases in protein intake:

- Support lean muscle maintenance, particularly important as we age
- Improve satiety and help with weight management
- Can displace refined carbohydrates from the diet (which have been associated with increased rates of chronic disease)
- Support metabolic health across the lifespan

The new recommendation of 1.2-1.6 grams per kilogram reflects optimal intake rather than minimal adequate intake.

However, individuals with certain medical conditions, such as chronic kidney disease, lupus and diabetes, should consult with their doctors before making any modifications to their protein intake.

Q2: If the guidelines recommend 1.2-1.6 grams of protein per kilogram, how do I calculate my target?

For most classes and cases, you may not need to help clients calculate protein needs. Continue to communicate protein needs in portion sizes, such as ounces or cups (if possible). For additional resources related to servings needed for calorie levels, refer to cdn.realfood.gov/Daily%20Serving%20Sizes.pdf.

However, should you need to know how to use this calculation, the example is listed below.

A: Follow these steps:

1. Determine your weight in kilograms by dividing pounds by 2.2.
2. Determine how many grams of protein you need by multiplying by 1.2 (lower end) and 1.6 (upper end).

- Example for a 150-pound person:
 - $150 \text{ pounds} \div 2.2 = 68 \text{ kg}$
 - $68 \text{ kg} \times 1.2 \text{ grams protein} = 82 \text{ grams protein}$
 - $68 \text{ kg} \times 1.6 \text{ grams protein} = 109 \text{ grams protein}$
 - Target range: 82-109 grams protein per day

For reference, below is an estimate of the amount of protein (grams) in various foods*:

Estimated Protein in Common Foods*

1 large, boiled egg	6 grams
½ cup scrambled egg	8 grams
1 cup milk	8 grams
½ cup Greek yogurt	12.5 grams
2 Tablespoons peanut butter	7 grams
1-ounce peanuts	7 grams
1-ounce almonds	6 grams
1 cup soy milk	7 grams
½ cup canned pinto beans	8 grams
½ cup canned black beans	9 grams
½ cup cooked edamame	15 grams
3-ounce cooked fish	22 grams
3-ounce beef sirloin	17 grams
3-ounce pork tenderloin	15 grams
3-ounce tofu	7 grams

*Protein amounts are estimates and can vary by brand and preparation.

*Amounts are rounded. Nutrient information is from USDA Food Data Central.

The guidelines suggest adjusting based on individual caloric needs and activity levels.

The guidelines also include a daily servings chart for various food groups, based on calorie levels. People can also use information from the daily servings chart to estimate their protein requirements. Protein requirements from the daily servings chart are listed below:

Calorie Level	1000	1200	1400	1600	1800	2000	2200	2400	2600	2800	3000	3200
Protein Servings per Day*	1-1.5	1.5-2	2-2.5	2.5-3.5	3-4	3.5-4.5	3.5-4.5	3.5-4.5	3.5-4.5	4-5	4-5	4-5

*Protein foods include animal- and plant-based protein foods, including meat, poultry, eggs, seafood, beans, peas, lentils, legumes, nuts, seeds, and soy.

Examples of protein food serving sizes are:

- 3 ounces cooked meat, poultry or seafood
- 1 egg
- ½ cup beans, peas, or lentils
- 1 oz. nuts or seeds
- 2 Tablespoons nut or seed butter
- 3 ounces soy

Q3: Does the emphasis on full-fat dairy mean low-fat options are unhealthy?

A: No. The guidelines recommend full-fat dairy with no added sugars, but they do not declare low-fat options unhealthy or discourage their consumption.

Important qualification: The guidelines maintain that saturated fat overall should comprise less than 10 percent of daily calories. This means full-fat dairy fits within a healthy diet but should be part of a balanced eating pattern rather than consumed without limitation.

Individuals should choose based on personal preference, tolerance and how the choice fits within their total dietary pattern.

Young children have limited space in their stomachs and should, therefore, avoid filling up on full-fat dairy products; priority should be given to offering whole foods first. Full-fat dairy products should be limited to 16oz/day to avoid iron deficiencies.

Individuals with a dairy allergy or lactose-intolerance should follow their doctor's recommendations for meeting their calcium and vitamin D intake levels.

Q4: Are artificial sweeteners part of the new guidelines?

A: No. The guidelines state that “no amount of added sugars or non-nutritive sweeteners is recommended or considered part of a healthy or nutritious diet.”

This is a significant departure from some previous guidance that positioned artificial sweeteners as acceptable alternatives to sugar. The new guidelines recommend avoiding both.

Q5: What specific ultra processed foods should be avoided?

A: The guidelines explicitly recommend avoiding:

- Packaged snack foods (chips, crackers, etc.)
- Cookies and candy
- Sugar-sweetened beverages (soda, fruit drinks, energy drinks)
- Ready-to-eat prepared foods high in sodium, added sugars, or artificial additives

The core principle is to prioritize foods prepared at home or minimally processed, where you control ingredients and preparation methods.

Q6: How can educators communicate the protein increase without triggering resistance?

A: Given the significance of the protein recommendation change, consider these communication strategies for your Extension audiences:

For general audiences:

- Frame it as “supporting muscle and bone health” rather than emphasizing the numerical increase
- Provide practical meal examples: “Include a palm-sized serving of protein at breakfast, lunch and dinner”
- Emphasize diverse sources (beans, eggs, fish, poultry, meat, nuts, seeds)

For specific populations:

- Older adults: Frame as muscle maintenance and fall prevention
- Weight management: Emphasize satiety and appetite control benefits
- Plant-based eaters: Highlight inclusion of legumes, nuts, seeds and soy

Q7: How does the new pyramid compare to the old food pyramid I learned about?

A: The original food pyramid (1992-2005) had a very similar structure to the current inverted pyramid but was not inverted. Key differences:

Aspect	Original Pyramid (1992)	New Inverted Pyramid (2026)
Top	Fats & Oils (minimize)	Protein, Dairy, Healthy Fats
Upper-Middle	Protein & Dairy groups	Vegetables & Fruits
Lower-Middle	Vegetables & Fruits	Whole Grains
Base	Grains	N/A (pyramid inverted)
Message	Grains as foundation	Proteins & produce as foundation

Q8: What do the new guidelines say about meal frequency and meal timing?

A: The guidelines emphasize consistency across meals rather than prescribing specific meal timing or frequency. Key guidance includes:

- Prioritize high-quality protein at every meal (not just certain meals)
- No single meal should contain more than 10 grams of added sugar
- Meals should be built around protein, vegetables, and healthy fats

This allows flexibility for individual schedules and preferences while maintaining nutritional consistency throughout the day.

Q9: Are there specific guidelines for children, pregnant women or other populations?

A: Yes. The 2025-2030 guidelines include specific recommendations for:

- Infants and children (with special guidance: children under age 4 should have no added sugars)
- Adolescents
- Pregnant and lactating women
- Older adults
- Individuals with chronic disease
- Vegetarians and vegans

For Extension education purposes, you may want to reference the full guidelines for population-specific recommendations when working with these groups.

Q10: How do these guidelines align with popular diet movements?

A: While the guidelines don't endorse any single diet approach, they align more closely with some nutrition philosophies than others:

- The emphasis on whole foods, adequate protein and avoidance of ultra processed foods aligns with principles found in Paleo, Mediterranean and whole-foods-based approaches.

- The de-emphasis on grains as a dietary foundation represents a shift away from grain-centered approaches, though whole grains remain recommended.
- The guidelines maintain balance by continuing to recommend fruits, vegetables and whole grains while emphasizing their appropriate proportion in the diet.

Part 5: Implementation Considerations for Extension Education

As a nutrition educator, you may consider how these new guidelines inform your program delivery:

5.1 Curriculum Alignment

Existing and new nutrition education materials will be reviewed for alignment with the new protein emphasis and processed foods guidance. This will be done across Tennessee Extension programs, including EFNEP, Family and Consumer Sciences, and 4-H. At this time, continue teaching curricula as you always have until you have completed updated nutrition training and/or a specialist provides updates.

Many of the core nutrition messages remain consistent: focusing on nutrient dense food choices, encouraging fruits and vegetables, choosing whole grain foods and limiting saturated fat intake to less than 10 percent of calories.

While guidance around added sugars has shifted to eliminating added sugars, existing curriculum encourages limiting added sugars in the diet to no more than 10 percent of calories. Complete elimination of dietary components is difficult for most people, and even a small amount of added sugars is present in many foods that are considered nutritious food choices. For example, two slices of whole wheat bread have about 2-3 grams of added sugar (exact amounts will vary by brand). For many people, gradual reduction of added sugar intake is most feasible and more likely to lead to sustainable change.

In nutrition classes, you can encourage participants to limit the amount of added sugar they consume. Help participants identify foods with added sugars using the nutrition facts label and encourage them to set goals and engage in small, sustainable steps to reduce added sugar consumption toward this recommendation.

While discussing dairy foods, remind participants that whole milk and products made with whole milk like yogurt and cheese continue to provide important nutrients like calcium and vitamin D; however, they do add saturated fat and calories to our eating routine. Consuming nutritious foods at a healthy and appropriate calorie level and choosing foods that provide less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat remains important. Encourage participants to balance the saturated fat and calorie content of their other food choices if whole milk dairy products are preferred.

MyPlate.gov and all associated resources are no longer accessible online. At this time, there have not been any definitive recommendations regarding continued use of MyPlate for education. MyPlate is a useful tool and graphic aid to help participants plan meals and understand dietary needs. **If you have MyPlate resources available, you can choose to continue to use them if desirable, until we are told otherwise.**

You can mention that the current dietary guidelines recommend consuming more protein than in the past. When pointing to the protein and grains side of the plate, you could say a phrase like, “The current dietary guidelines recommend consuming more protein than they have in the past. To help meet this recommendation, you might choose a little more protein foods and a little less grain when you plan your plate. Remember that we want to choose protein and whole grains that give us the nutrients we need.” We will send updated guidance as more information is made available.

To date, there are minimal consumer educational resources to accompany these new dietary recommendations. We will be revising nutrition education materials to replace resources that are referenced and that are no longer available. Consider these replacement resources until more information is available:

*If a curriculum references MyPlate Kitchen as a useful site for recipes, consider suggesting the American Diabetes Association, The American Heart Association, healthyfamilies.tennessee.edu, and other Extension sites as a credible site for recipes.

*If a curriculum references MyPlate as a site to estimate calorie needs, consider suggesting another reputable site such as those listed below:

American Cancer Society: cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/eat-healthy/calorie-counter-calculator.html

Mayo Clinic: [mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/weight-loss/in-depth/calorie-calculator/itt-20402304](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/weight-loss/in-depth/calorie-calculator/itt-20402304)

*If a curriculum references identifying a MyPlate plan and the website is not available, consider suggesting one of the websites above to identify calorie needs and referring to the daily servings table (Appendix A) for estimated servings per day of each food group.

If you have concerns that a curriculum you are using does not meet these guidelines, please contact the FCS Nutrition Team for further guidance.

5.2 Educational Messaging

The phrase “Eat real food” provides an accessible entry point for Extension audiences at all literacy levels. Consider organizing education around:

- What to eat more of: Protein, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, healthy fats
- What to eat less of: Added sugars, ultra processed foods, artificial additives
- Focus on: Moderation, balance and variety of different food groups, and appropriate portion sizes

5.3 Audience-Specific Applications

- Food security programs: Emphasize protein sources that stretch food budgets (beans, eggs, canned fish, canned/frozen fruits and vegetables)
- Drug recovery/wellness programs: Frame nutrition as foundational to physical and mental health recovery
- School lunch alignment: New guidelines may influence school meal patterns
- Older adult nutrition: Emphasize protein for muscle maintenance and fall prevention
- Cultural adaptations: Continue to adapt specific food items to the needs of the community. For example, suggest alternative animal-based and plant-based proteins for those who may not consume pork for religious and/or cultural purposes.

Conclusion

The 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans represent a significant evolution in federal nutrition policy, with the core message of prioritizing whole foods and increasing protein intake. While some recommendations represent substantial changes (particularly protein and added sugar guidance), the fundamental principles of eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains and limiting ultra processed foods remain consistent with decades of nutrition research.

For Extension educators and nutrition professionals, these guidelines provide an evidence-based framework for program implementation and audience education. The emphasis on whole foods aligns well with the existing Tennessee Extension framework and current programming.

As with any federal guidance, implementation will evolve, and ongoing attention to emerging research—particularly regarding the proportion and types of protein sources—remains important for responsive, evidence-based nutrition education.

Additional Resources

- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans: [realfood.gov/](https://www.realfood.gov/)
- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans: cdn.realfood.gov/DGA.pdf
- Executive Order about whole milk in schools: fns.usda.gov/nsip/wmfhka-implementation
- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Response: eatrightpro.org/about-us/who-we-are/public-statements/academy-statement-on-2025-2030-dgas-release
- Center for Science in Public Interest Response to Dietary Guidelines: cspi.org/advocacy/nutrition/dietary-guidelines-americans

- American Heart Association Response: newsroom.heart.org/news/releases-20260107-6915862
- Harvard School of Public Health Response: hsph.harvard.edu/news/understanding-the-new-dietary-guidelines-for-americans/

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Appendix A: Daily Servings per Calorie Level*

Food Group	Calorie Level of Pattern											
	1000	1200	1400	1600	1800	2000	2200	2400	2600	2800	3000	3200
Protein¹	1-1.5	1.5-2	2-2.5	2.5-3.5	2.5-3.5	3-4	3.5-4.5	3.5-4.5	3.5-4.5	4-5	4-5	4-5
Dairy²	2	2.5	2.5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Vegetables³	1.25	1.75	1.75	2.5	3	3	3.5	3.5	4.25	4.25	4.75	4.75
Fruits⁴	1	1	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	2	2	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
Whole Grains⁵	1-2	1.5-2.75	1.75-3.25	1.75-3.25	2-4	2-4	2.25-4.5	2.75-5.25	3-6	3.25-6.5	3.25-6.5	3.25-6.5
Healthy Fats⁶	2.5	2.5	2.5	3.5	4	4.5	4.5	5	5.5	6	7	8

*These serving sizes should align with the recommendations in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030. A variety of foods should be selected from each food group. Foods are assumed to be nutrient dense, with no or limited added sugars, refined carbohydrates, or chemical additives.

¹Protein serving size examples include: 3 ounces cooked meat, poultry or seafood, 1 egg, ½ cup beans, peas, or lentils, 1 oz. nuts or seeds, 2 Tablespoons nut or seed butter, 3 ounces soy

²Dairy serving size examples include: 1 cup milk, ¾ cup yogurt, 1 ounce cheese

³Vegetable serving size examples include: 1 cup raw or cooked, 2 cups leafy greens

⁴Fruit serving size examples include: 1 cup raw, ½ cup dried

⁵Whole grain serving size examples include: ½ cup cooked oats, brown rice, barley, quinoa, or buckwheat; 1 slice bread; 1 tortilla

⁶Healthy fat serving size examples include: 1 teaspoon olive oil or butter



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