

U.S. Dietary Guidelines Revision

by Ann Gerhardt, MD

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Meetings of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee have been in process all year and will continue through March 2020. It might be interesting to watch the webcast or even contribute to by submitting questions. (See links below).

The official federal *Dietary Guidelines* publication is required under the 1990 National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act. Every five years the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and of Agriculture (hereafter I'll call 'the agencies') must jointly analyze the latest dietary and nutrition information and publish a report to help Americans make smart choices about food.

The statute (Public Law 101-445, 7 U.S.C. 5341 et seq.) requires a Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, composed of nutrition experts, to make dietary recommendations based on a preponderance of scientific evidence. Their recommendations are revised, based on the agencies' and the public's comments, then published and stand for 5 years. This process led to the Food Guide Pyramid, and all its subsequent modifications, based on science.

The 2015-2020 Guidelines are fairly basic and logical:

1. Follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, support nutrient adequacy and reduce chronic disease.
2. Focus on variety, nutrient density and amount of foods from across and within all food groups.
3. Consume an eating pattern low in added sugars, saturated fats and sodium.
4. Shift to healthier, more nutrient dense foods in place of less healthy.
5. Create and support healthy eating patterns at home, school, work and communities.

The *Washington Post* recently published an article criticizing the process for the 2020-2025 publication. They say that too many committee members have industry affiliation, though all of them are university-based. This might be hard to avoid, since a lot of

nutrition research is funded by food or nutrition product companies.



The *Post* is concerned that the Questions the Committee must address don't include specific mention of red and processed meat, ultra-processed foods and salt intake. Since eight of the Questions begin with "What is the relationship between dietary patterns consumed and",,, (a wide range of health outcomes), I feel sure the recommendations will include comments about meat, processing and salt, since they are dietary pattern components.

The *Post* asserts that the agencies permitting the committee to make decisions based only on studies vetted by officials from the agencies, which are headed by political appointees. The Guidelines website says that "The Committee is using three scientific approaches to examine the evidence: data analysis, food pattern modeling, and systematic reviews. Each approach has its own rigorous methodology. For each question, a specific protocol is created to describe how the Committee will apply the methodology for one of those approaches to answer the question. Each protocol is created before the Advisory Committee examines any evidence and is posted below for the public to view..."

That sounds reasonable. I know the Committee's Chair, Barbara Schneeman PhD. Her scientific and ethical standards have always been above reproach and I'm confident that she'll steer a sound course.

An additional concern is that none of the Questions address food sustainability and meat production's effect on the environment. Animals are an important protein source in a typical human omnivorous diet, but meat production has a disproportionate impact on the environment. It contributes 18% of global greenhouse gases. The 2015 Guidelines addressed these issues but created considerable controversy. Political pressure from Congress, the meat industry and special interest groups scuttled mention of these issues in the final Guidelines. This year's Committee may be gun-shy.

The Committee wants our input, in person or via webcast. The last two committee meetings are January 23-24, 2020 in Houston

<https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/meeting-4>

and March 12-13, 2020 in Washington, DC (see future link at <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/work-under-way/review-science/public-meetings> when posted.