



Boost these foods, nutrients in your diet

What nutrients are generally lacking in the American diet? Which foods should I focus on increasing to help?

Although on average, we Americans have plenty of food at our disposal, the new federal dietary guidelines say that intakes of several nutrients — potassium, dietary fiber, calcium and vitamin D — are low enough to be a public health concern. In addition, consumption of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, milk and other dairy products, and healthful oils tends to be lower than recommended — sometimes much lower.

The guidelines focus an entire chapter on “Foods and Nutrients to Increase,” offering helpful advice for eating a more healthful diet and staying within calorie guidelines.

Among the recommendations:

- Eat more (and a wider variety) of fruits and vegetables to increase not only the potassium and fiber in your diet, but also folate, magnesium, and vitamins A, C and K. The guidelines recommend 2.5 cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruit a day for someone on a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet. Currently, almost all Americans (at least those over the age of 2) fail to eat as much produce as recommended.

- At least half of the grains you eat should be whole grains. Although that’s been a recommendation for years, less than 5 percent of Americans follow that advice. Study the ingredients listings on bread, pasta, cereal and other grains: If the only grains listed are “whole,” then

the food is a 100-percent whole grain food. If both whole grains and other grains (such as “wheat flour” or “multigrain”) are included in the ingredients listing, the food is only partially “whole grain.” Look for “whole” grains listed first or second in the ingredients.

- Drink more milk and eat more dairy products, but choose low-fat or fat-free versions. The guidelines recommend anyone 9 or older consume the equivalent of 3 cups of milk a day. But currently, about half of Americans’ dairy intake is in the form of cheese, primarily full-fat types (look for 2-percent cheese instead). All dairy products provide calcium, but getting more of your dairy from low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt instead of cheese will boost your intake of potassium and vitamins A and D and decrease sodium, cholesterol and saturated fat.

- Eat 8 to 12 ounces of a variety of fish and seafood per week, particularly fatty fish such as salmon or trout to increase omega-3 fatty acids. But avoid fish that are high in methyl mercury, particularly tilefish, shark, swordfish, king mackerel and, to a lesser extent, white (albacore) tuna.

The guidelines also provide advice for incorporating more healthful oils and fiber in your diet. Read them in their entirety at <http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov>.

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This column is the third in a series about the 2010 Dietary Guidelines, which were released on Jan. 31, 2011.

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