



## Focus on healthy eating patterns

**I looked up my personal recommended dietary intake on “MyPyramid.gov,” but I’m finding it difficult to put into practice. Are there some easier general guidelines I can follow to improve my diet?**

One of the key recommendations in the new dietary guidelines is that consumers account for all foods and beverages they consume and determine how they fit within a total healthy eating pattern.

But for most people, that can be a time-consuming task that would be difficult to keep up on a daily basis. It’s a good idea to track your intake at least occasionally, but, yes, there are some general changes you can make that could have a big impact.

The dietary guidelines report contains an eye-opening bar graph showing just how far off our typical diet is from what’s recommended. It shows Americans generally eat:

- 110 percent of the saturated fat that’s recommended.
  - 149 percent of the sodium.
  - 200 percent of refined grains.
  - 280 percent of the calories from solid fats and added sugars.
- In addition, the graph shows that Americans don’t eat nearly enough of the foods and nutrients we should consume. We eat only:
- 75 percent of the calcium we need.
  - 61 percent of the oils (which contain healthful fats).
  - 59 percent of the vegetables.
  - 56 percent of the potassium.

- 52 percent of the dairy.
- 44 percent of the seafood.
- 42 percent of the fruits.
- 40 percent of the fiber.
- 28 percent of the vitamin D.
- 15 percent of the whole grains.

Given those startling statistics, it’s not hard to determine where you might start to improve your diet.

First, focus on the amount of calories you’re consuming from solid fats and added sugars and see what you can do to reduce them. For example, choosing a cup of regular corn flakes instead of frosted flakes reduces calories from 147 to 90 by eliminating the added sugar. Choosing a baked potato instead of curly fries reduces calories from 258 to 117 by eliminating added fat. Choosing fat-free milk instead of whole milk reduces calories from 149 to 83 — again, by reducing fat.

Then, look at foods to increase in your diet. Choose more whole grains (replacing many of the refined grains you’re eating), and look at Nutrition Facts labels to boost your intake of calcium, potassium, vitamin D and fiber. And find ways to incorporate more fruits, vegetables, seafood and low-fat dairy into your diet.

Just making these sorts of shifts can have a big impact. For more information and guidance, read the 2010 Dietary Guidelines at <http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov>.

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**Editor:**

This column was reviewed by Julie Kennel, nutrition program manager for Ohio State University Extension in the Department of Human Nutrition in the College of Education and Human Ecology.

This column is the fourth in a series about the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which were released on Jan. 31, 2011. **Note: The bar graph noted in the column is on the next page.**

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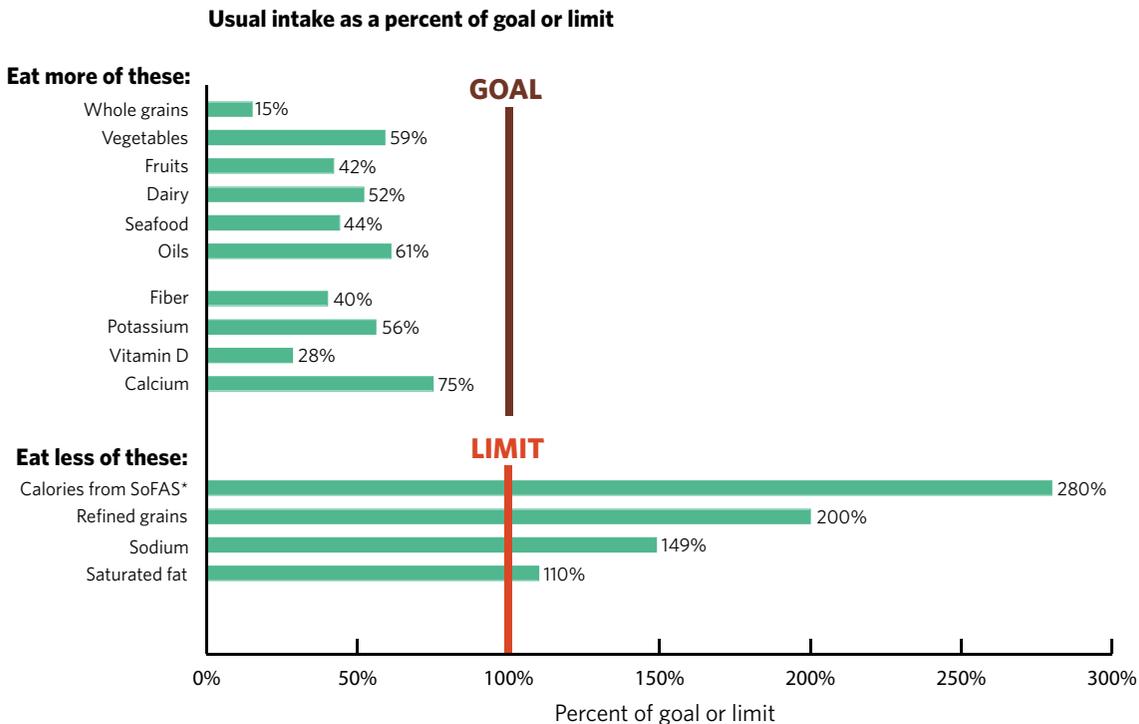
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## FIGURE 5-1. How Do Typical American Diets Compare to Recommended Intake Levels or Limits?



\*SoFAS = solid fats and added sugars.

Note: Bars show average intakes for all individuals (ages 1 or 2 years or older, depending on the data source) as a percent of the recommended intake level or limit. Recommended intakes for food groups and limits for refined grains and solid fats and added sugars are based on amounts in the USDA 2000-calorie food pattern. Recommended intakes for fiber, potassium, vitamin D, and calcium are based on the highest AI or RDA for ages 14 to 70 years. Limits for sodium are based on the UL and for

saturated fat on 10% of calories. The protein foods group is not shown here because, on average, intake is close to recommended levels.

Based on data from: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What We Eat in America, NHANES 2001-2004 or 2005-2006.

From the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*, p. 46