



TO YOUR HEART! Salt, Sugar and Sauces – the 2015 Dietary Guidelines

By Narendra Singh MD



This year the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) issued a report that hopefully will shake up the food industry and more importantly individual Americans. While it would be impossible to summarize the 500 page report (<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015-dga-timeline.pdf>) I want to highlight some key recommendations that can improve your heart health.

In general terms, DGAC reaffirms that a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low or non-fat dairy, seafood, legumes, nuts and moderate alcohol (adults only) is beneficial. Reducing red and processed meat, sugar-sweetened foods and drinks as well as refined grains is equally important. The report also confirms that a plant based diet is not only healthier but also environmentally more sustainable than our traditional animal foods diet.

The report reemphasizes the value of replacing saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats. This lowers your bad cholesterol (LDL) and thereby reduces heart attacks and strokes. On the other hand, our previous dietary policy of restricting total fats and replacing them with carbohydrates has no beneficial impact on cardiovascular risk! Saturated fats should be limited to less than 10% of total calories. Dietary cholesterol such as from butter and eggs should no longer be restricted. The majority (80%) of cholesterol is produced in the liver and thus dietary intake has limited impact on blood levels.

Sugar consumption came out as one of the biggest concerns. It is one of the key factors in why 2/3 of Americans are considered overweight or obese. It is the trigger for diabetes and all its devastating complications. Sugar should represent no more than 10% of total energy intake...a daunting target in our carb-rich world!

Salt has been equally contentious but the goals for the general population are to limit to less than 2300 gm a day. Reading food labels and utilizing electronic or written

diaries are important tools for recognizing and changing dietary patterns.

With respect to seafood, DGAC advised paying more attention to the type of fish rather than the farm versus wild caught debate. Salmon and trout have much higher omega 3 levels per serving than do catfish or crawfish.

Dietary supplement often lead to overconsumption of certain nutrients, which is not necessary, but in general also not harmful. Certain nutrients such as Vitamins A, D, E, C, folate, calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium and fiber are underconsumed. It's one of the reasons why a multivitamin a day is still worthwhile.

The committee also understood the need to reduce overall caloric intake by decreasing portion size and improving product labeling of total calories. Equally important was the need to increase physical activity over all age groups and populations. The success of the tobacco cessation campaign is now being reengineered to impact dietary behavior. Curtailing marketing to kids, adding soda taxes, limiting caloric density, offering fitness memberships or healthy food subsidies, may all play a role as we work both individually and collectively towards a healthier America! ■

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