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Reducing Fat in the American Diet

Introduction

Today, more than ever, Americans are concerned about eating foods that are

good for them. One of their main concerns is consumption of *fat*. Americans and even

their government have become concerned about citizens' eating habits.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture
and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, are recommendations
by nutrition experts who agree that enough is known about dietary effects on
health to encourage certain dietary practices.

When first introduced in 1980,

"... many groups and individuals from the health professions and the food
industry questioned the scientific basis of the guidelines and even the
federal government's authority to advise its citizens on what they should
eat."

Government officials responded by saying that the rapid pace of scientific discovery
makes it impossible for average Americans to stay abreast of the most recent
information. Government guidelines provide at least a starting point. Updated twice
since then, the guidelines give advice on what foods Americans two years old and older
should eat to stay healthy.

The seven Dietary Guidelines for Americans are:

Eat a variety of foods
Maintain healthy weight
Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol
Choose a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits, and grain products

Use sugars only in moderation
Use salt and sodium only in moderation
If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation

These guidelines state that forty different nutrients are needed for good health, and no one food provides all the essential nutrients a body needs to stay healthy. Thus, the guidelines recommend that Americans eat a variety of foods from the major food groups—fruits and vegetables; cereals and other foods made from grains; dairy products; and meats, fish, poultry, eggs, and dry beans and peas. In addition, the guidelines emphasize that moderate consumption is the key to good health. Still, a major emphasis of the guidelines is given to encourage Americans to eat less fat. They even recommend goals for total fat intake, saturated fat consumption, and cholesterol consumption.

Fat in the American Diet

According to the guidelines, the American diet has too many calories and too much fat, cholesterol, and sodium. This type of diet is one cause of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. "Many American diets have too many calories and too much fat (especially saturated fat), cholesterol, and sodium. They also have too little complex carbohydrates and fiber. Such diets are one cause of America's high rates of obesity (being overweight) and of certain diseases—heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, and some forms of cancer." The guidelines say that the diet of Americans, compared to that of some countries, generally is high in fat and cholesterol, and Americans tend to have high blood cholesterol levels. The guidelines say that Americans should eat 30 percent or less of calories in fat.