

Consumer Communications Research Findings & Application

GOALS:

- Create messages that will inspire individuals to look for more information about healthy eating.
- Communicate *Dietary Guidelines* concepts that are scientifically accurate, yet are understandable and meaningful to consumers (individuals).

METHODOLOGY

Focus Groups were conducted to gain insights into both the reactions to and interpretations of potential *Dietary Guidelines* recommendations and attitudes toward motivators designed to compel participants to search for more information about healthy eating behaviors. The target audience for the focus groups was 24-64-year-old healthy weight or overweight men and women (not obese) with an interest in healthy eating and no chronic disease¹.

Segmentation Strategy

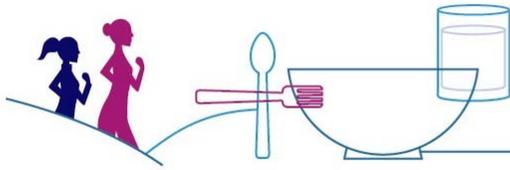
Groups were stratified by age, gender, and BMI score (self reported height/weight by participants with BMI calculated by recruiter; healthy weight BMI = 19-24.9; overweight BMI = 25.0-29.9). Participants fell into one of two different age categories: 24 to 44 years of age and 45 to 64 years of age. They represented a mix of ethnicity, education levels, marital statuses, and household incomes.

Overall, the focus groups:

- 1) Explored information sources that conveyed healthy eating messages and the degree to which respondents trust those sources.
- 2) Reviewed a number of thematic phrases to determine which would most likely inspire respondents to search for more information about how to “be healthy.”
- 3) Focused on how effectively specific words and statements conveyed potential *Dietary Guidelines* recommendations (overall clarity and word choice/connotation).

Gender	Description	Ages	Location	
			Baltimore	Chicago
Female	Healthy/Overweight	24-44	x	x
		45-64	x	x
Male	Healthy/Overweight	24-44	x	x
		45-64	x	x
TOTAL NUMBER OF GROUPS = 8			4	4

¹ This focus group research was intended to reach a primary audience of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. It is recognized that other research will be used to develop more targeted, specific messages.

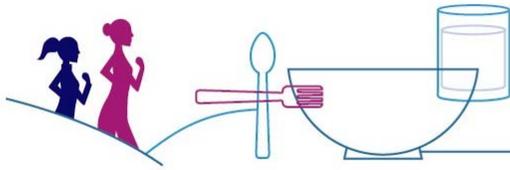


KEY FINDINGS

- 1) Respondents identified doctors, word of mouth (e.g., friends, colleagues, family), and to a lesser extent, the Internet, books, and magazines as sources of health information. Many participants questioned the often conflicting information received from these multiple sources, and as a result, expressed frustration about the difficulties associated with finding “correct” healthy eating information that is applicable to their unique lifestyles.
- 2) Specific themes resonated with respondents that would inspire them to search for more information about healthy eating: ***My health is my future, A better me, It’s all about balance and It’s not a program. It’s a lifestyle.***

The degree to which respondents valued healthy eating as a component of being healthy differed. Some included improving eating and exercise behaviors as important steps to becoming healthy, whereas others emphasized non-nutritional activities such as quitting smoking or reducing stress in their lives.

- 3) General points that surfaced during discussions for the *Dietary Guidelines*:
 - **Be inclusive** -- respondents want to be able to apply them to their individual lifestyles—and not in ways that do not automatically assume that they engage in a negative behavior.
 - **Trust of the recommendations’ source is imperative.** It’s easier to trust (and follow) the recommendations of a blanket statement if respondents feel they can rely on the source.
 - **Familiarity with these messages did not equate to comprehension.** Although respondents said they are bombarded with numerous healthy eating messages, they still exhibit confusion about a number of healthy eating terms, even those they have “heard before.”
 - **Rejected overly worded or phrases that sounded too “market-y.”** Simply providing additional information is not a solution to reducing the knowledge gap. Additional information is frequently requested but there is clear aversion to overly wordy statements that the respondents would unlikely read outside the focus group setting.



APPLICATION OF FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION

Motivation is essential: When communicating the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, put them in a context that is meaningful to consumers (individuals).

1. **Reinforce the theme: Feel better today. Stay healthy for tomorrow.** And leverage the findings from the following four themes that inspired consumers to search for more information:
 - ***My health is my future*** – Consumers connect with the theme’s emphasis on the importance of staying healthy for themselves, their families, *and* their future.
 - ***A better me*** – Consumers like the positive outcomes associated with the message and the ease with which they could connect the message to their personal experience.
 - ***It’s all about balance*** – This captures the need for individuals to identify what behaviors are right for them, given their body type and lifestyle.
 - ***It’s not a program. It’s a lifestyle*** – This reiterates the need to make healthy lifestyle changes, rather than following an overly prescriptive, or trendy, diet.

Trust is important, and consumers (individuals) like to be reassured of credibility.

2. **Position the *Dietary Guidelines* as a trustworthy and usable:**
 - “The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* provide you with core principles from which you can build a healthy lifestyle based on individual needs, likes and dislikes.”
 - “These *Dietary Guidelines* are based on the most up-to-date science available and come from the leading health and nutrition experts in the country.”
 - “Incorporating the principles of the *Dietary Guidelines* into your day-to-day eating and activity habits will help you feel better and have more energy now, and stay healthy for yourself and your loved-ones in the future.”

The more the individual knows, the more choices they have.

3. **Communicate “choice” to speak to and empower the individual:**
 - “‘Choice’ helps you to empower, personalize, and educate.”
 - Encourage individuals to make smart choices from a variety of foods, learn how to use the label to make choices, and choose to be more physically active. It is all about choices—and finding what’s right for you.

Keep it simple, but true to the science.

4. **Communicate simply, keeping in mind that consumers are:**
 - Confused by conflicting health messages that revolve around them.
 - Unclear about “nutritional” and “healthy-eating” terms such as “trans fat,” “nutrient dense,” “energy needs,” and “good fat.”