

TO: Richard D. Olson, MD, MPH
Kellie (O'Connell) Casavale, PhD, RD
Colette I. Rihane, MS, RD
Shanthy A. Bowman, PhD

FROM: Marianne Smith Edge, MS, RD, LD, FADA
Senior Vice President, Nutrition & Food Safety
International Food Information Council (IFIC) and IFIC Foundation

RE: 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee Public Comments

The [International Food Information Council \(IFIC\)](#) and [IFIC Foundation](#) appreciate the opportunity to submit comments to the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC). Our ensuing comments are constructed with the 2010 DGAC "Needs for Future Research" in mind. We believe our years of consumer research and related peer-reviewed articles will be of great value to the DGAC in supporting innovative ways to motivate the American public toward more healthful lifestyles and behaviors.

IFIC and IFIC Foundation are nonprofit organizations based in Washington, DC. The mission of IFIC is to effectively communicate science-based information about food safety and nutrition to health professionals, government officials, educators, journalists, and consumers. The mission of the IFIC Foundation is to effectively communicate science-based information about health, nutrition and food safety for the public good. Both IFIC and the IFIC Foundation receive primary funding from food, beverage and agricultural companies that support our missions. We also receive government grants and contributions from other individuals, foundations and associations.

IFIC and IFIC Foundation consumer research has been exploring Americans' attitudes toward nutrition and health for more than two decades with our signature research project being the annual IFIC Foundation *Food & Health Survey*. We are dedicated to providing consumers with clear, accurate advice and actionable tips on how science-based information related to nutrition, health, and food safety can be applied to their daily lives.

ENERGY BALANCE

RESEARCH NEEDS ADDRESSED:

The 2010 DGAC identified the following research needs related to energy balance:

1. Conduct considerable new research on other behaviors that might influence eating practices.
2. Conduct research that clarifies both the positive and negative environmental influences that affect body weight

RELEVANCE:

Understanding consumer perceptions around calories, weight management, and physical activity will help inform where gaps occur between consumer awareness and action, allowing for more effective messaging and behavior change results. Additionally, a greater understanding of environmental influencers that affect body weight will help guide more effective approaches surrounding consumer messaging. The IFIC Foundation's annual *Food & Health Survey* consumer research data reinforces that the majority of Americans are unaware of their personal daily calorie needs; therefore it is difficult to know in what context consumers will utilize calorie information to influence their daily choices to achieve calorie balance.

FOR NUTRITION EVIDENCE LIBRARY (NEL) CONSIDERATION:

Reinhardt Kapsak W, DiMarco-Crook C, Hill JO, Toner C, Smith Edge M. Confusion on All Sides of the Calorie Equation: Lessons Learned, Future Directions. Nutrition Today. 2013.

Description: This IFIC Foundation article examines the calorie disconnect that exists as consumers remain largely unaware of personal calorie needs and the relationship between calories and weight management. Additionally, the article provides insights into how the environment can shape more positive and effective consumer messaging around energy balance and weight management.

KEY POINTS ADDRESSING RESEARCH NEED #1:

- Consumers lack understanding of calories and their role in weight management and acknowledge their perceived lack of education on calorie balance.
- Research results suggest that the term “energy balance” is poorly understood by consumers and inconsistent with their beliefs. There is a need for cohesive language to convey the calorie balance concept and the importance of continually monitoring consumer understanding of health messages.
- Consumers perceive health goals as long-term, not immediate and not urgent. The immediate needs of satisfying hunger, with minimal time and cost and meeting the many demands of family, home and work often trump long-term health goals.
- Almost one-quarter of Americans are not convinced that tracking calories consumed or burned matters all that much. Importantly, consumers express interest in multiple approaches to make calorie tracking easier.
- In terms of consumer perception of the connection between calories and weight management, the IFIC Foundation 2011 *Food & Health Survey* found a majority report actively trying to lose or maintain their weight. Yet, fewer than half of Americans are satisfied with their progress toward losing or maintaining weight. In addition, approximately one-third of those who are trying to lose or maintain weight, appear to be indifferent regarding their progress.
- In-depth analysis of consumer insights, research interventions, expert perspectives and a social-ecological approach will help guide further dialogue, shape future research and develop more effective initiatives to help consumers achieve calorie balance and a healthy weight.

KEY POINTS ADDRESSING RESEARCH NEED #2:

- Providing food and beverage calorie information is one part of the solution; identifying individual calorie “targets” would provide useful context for applying this information. Helping consumers discover their personal daily calorie number may be a first step to motivate from awareness to action.
- It may be necessary to first address the more fundamental problem regarding consumers' calorie confusion and knowledge gap. Individual factors, environmental settings, sectors of influence and social and cultural norms and values represented in the social-ecological model as well as the various sectors previously described all play an essential role in the formation of the calorie balance landscape.
- Hectic lifestyles and lack of time are identified by consumers, especially parents, as barriers to eating healthfully.
- Messages such as “Calories Count” and “Know Your Number” have generated positive response when tested among consumers.
- In order to effectively communicate calorie balance, it will be imperative to examine consumer response to calorie balance communications. Some messages or terminology, although widely accepted by nutrition and health professionals, may not be understood by consumers.

KEY POINTS FROM IFIC FOUNDATION 2013 *FOOD AND HEALTH SURVEY*:

- Four out of ten Americans think about calories often or always.
- Less than one-half of Americans believe that consuming more calories than burned leads to weight gain. Only three out of ten realize that all sources of calories influence weight gain equally.
- Just over half of Americans are trying to lose weight, and most of the rest are making an effort to maintain their weight.
- Positive messaging about foods to include in a healthful diet is preferred by three out of four Americans.
- Most Americans feel they have significant control over their activity, diet and weight- more so than their attractiveness and earnings. But fewer feel they can control the safety of what they consume.
- Lack of willpower and dislike of exercise are the most common reasons why Americans do not take more control over their weight.