

**DIETARY  
GUIDELINES  
FOR AMERICANS  
2015-2020  
EIGHTH EDITION**

# For Professionals: Talk to Your Patients & Clients About Healthy Eating Patterns


As a health care provider, you know that helping your patients or clients make healthier food choices is essential. Written for health professionals like you, the [2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) makes your job easier—with clear, evidence-based nutrition guidance you can trust.

The *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines* focuses on overall eating patterns—and how making healthy choices over time can have lasting health benefits. This guide can help you share the recommendations from the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines* with your patients or clients. Help inspire them to adopt healthier eating patterns.


## Get the Conversation Started

When talking about healthy eating and the *Dietary Guidelines*, keep the conversation positive and encouraging. Try these friendly conversation starters.


### What's your family's favorite dinner?

 Meet your patients or clients where they are. Once you have an idea how they're eating now, you can make suggestions for shifts and substitutions recommended in the *Dietary Guidelines*—ways to adapt their favorite dishes to make them healthier.


### Who does the grocery shopping in your home? Who cooks?

 Find out what they're buying and how much they're cooking. You might be able to make suggestions for new foods to try, or goals for cooking at home more often.


### What are some of your family's favorite food routines & traditions?

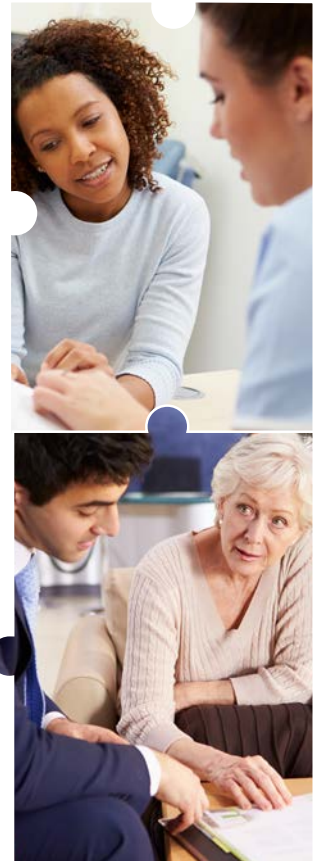
 Are patients or clients sharing family meals each night or eating separately? Talk about how healthy eating patterns are adaptable to any traditions or customs.

### When you're thirsty, what kind of drink do you reach for?

 Almost 50% of added sugars in the American diet comes from sodas, fruit drinks, and other sweetened beverages. See if you can steer them toward healthier options, like water.

### Does eating healthier seem hard or unrealistic?

 If there are barriers, find out what they are and suggest some workarounds. Read more on Page 3.



# Make Healthy Eating Seem Doable—Emphasize the Benefits

People may avoid changing their eating patterns because it feels overwhelming. Share these messages with your patients and clients to frame healthy changes in the *Dietary Guidelines* as small, manageable steps.

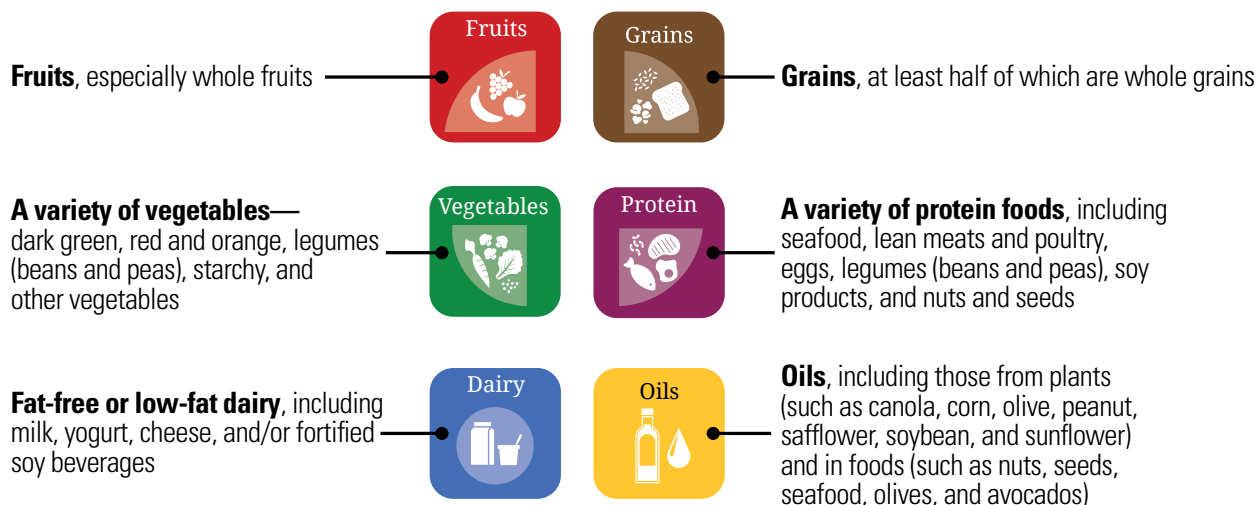
- **Eating healthier doesn't mean drastic changes for a family's eating plan.** Healthy eating isn't all or nothing. People can eat healthier and still enjoy the foods they love. The key is to make some small changes and healthy shifts.
- **There's no one "right" way to eat.** The *Dietary Guidelines* shows that there are lots of different paths to healthy eating. Anyone can find a healthy eating pattern that fits with their family's preferences, traditions, culture, and budget.
- **Healthy eating is one of the most powerful tools we have to prevent or delay disease.** It can help keep people healthy and active as they get older—giving them more time to spend with their families and do the activities they enjoy.

Use this graphic to help your patients and clients understand the basics of a healthy eating pattern.

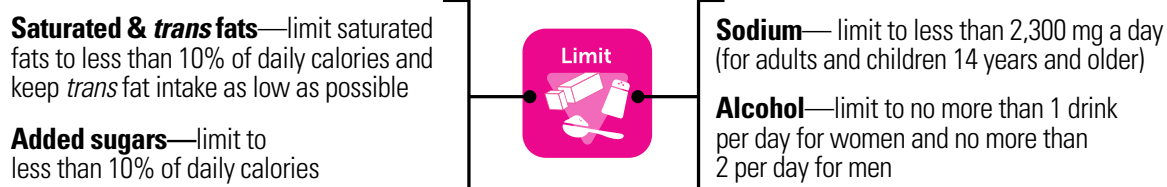
## What's in a Healthy Eating Pattern?

The *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines* has basic recommendations for a healthy eating pattern.

It includes foods like:



And it has limits on:



## Be Ready for Resistance

Your patients or clients may have valid reasons for why healthy eating is difficult. Here are some ways to get past common barriers.

### **They say: “I can’t afford healthy foods.”**



Explain that healthy eating is for everyone—regardless of income or household budget. For example, if fresh vegetables seem too expensive, suggest frozen or canned—just make sure they check the sodium content.

### **They say: “I don’t have the time to cook healthy meals.”**



Suggest cooking a healthy dinner just once a week—that’s a great first step. Or have them cook meals in batches on the weekend, so they can heat up dinners during the week.

### **They say: “My kids won’t eat anything healthy.”**



Point out that this is a common problem, but offer suggestions—like having kids help pick out a few healthy options at the grocery store and pitch in when cooking.

### **They say: “I don’t listen to the experts—they keep changing their minds about which foods are healthy and which aren’t.”**



Acknowledge that changes in guidance can be confusing, but emphasize that the basic core recommendations in the *Dietary Guidelines* have stayed largely consistent over the years. People can trust the *Dietary Guidelines*—they’re based on the body of the best nutrition evidence we have.

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## Tips for Successful Conversations

Some people may feel judged or criticized when you bring up healthy eating. Use these techniques to prevent that from happening.

- **Emphasize that you’re on the same side.** The two of you are working together to solve a problem. You’re not trying to criticize or lecture.
- **Celebrate successes.** If your patient makes steps toward healthier eating, cheer them on. If you notice any benefits—like a lower weight or improved blood pressure—link these changes to their improved diet.
- **Have empathy.** Changing behavior is hard—especially when it comes to food. The important thing is to encourage your patients and clients to keep trying. Try offering personal examples of how you overcome challenges to make healthy changes.

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## Take the Next Step

These are just a few topics you can broach with your patients or clients—there’s a lot more in the *Dietary Guidelines* to learn about and discuss.

- Go to [health.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines) to see the Recommendations At-A-Glance, the [complete 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines document](#), and handouts that you can share with your patients or clients.
- [Refer your patients or clients to ChooseMyPlate.gov](#), where they can learn more about the *Dietary Guidelines* and get practical advice, recipes, and more.

