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*“What’s New in the 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines”*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans reinforce familiar advice to eat more fruits and vegetables, choose whole grains, and limit processed foods. It does, however, place a greater emphasis on how Americans cook, combine, and select foods to support long-term health. According to Priscilla Brenes, a Nutrition and Wellness Specialist with Kansas State University Extension, the updated guidelines highlight gut health, higher-quality protein choices, and cooking skills that encourage healthier eating at home.

The USDA is calling for more high-quality, nutrient-dense protein options and greater attention to cooking methods. Recommended cooking techniques include baking, broiling, roasting, stir-frying, and grilling. This approach shifts the focus toward home-prepared meals rather than relying on ready-to-eat or restaurant foods. As people decrease their intake of convenience foods or dine out less, developing confidence in basic cooking methods becomes increasingly important.

Protein plays a central role in the new guidelines, with recommendations to prioritize high-quality, nutrient-dense protein foods at every meal. These sources can come from both animal and plant-based options. For meat dishes, the guidelines encourage minimizing added sugars and refined carbohydrates, and enhancing flavor with herbs and spices rather than heavy sauces. Dairy foods also remain an important part of a healthy eating pattern, with an emphasis on whole dairy products that do not contain added sugar. Dairy provides essential nutrients, including fat-soluble vitamins D and A, as well as B vitamins that support brain and body function. Fruits and vegetables remain a cornerstone of the dietary guidelines, with an emphasis on variety and color to maximize vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support gut health. While fresh produce is preferred, frozen, dried, or canned options can also be healthy choices if they contain no added sugars and limited sodium. Whole grains are also highlighted for their fiber and nutrient content. Consumers are encouraged to choose grains that retain the bran, germ, and endosperm, such as oats, quinoa, brown rice, and whole wheat.

Despite increased protein intake and the inclusion of whole-fat dairy, moderation remains a key message. The guidelines recommend limiting saturated fat to no more than 10% of daily calories, based on a 2,000-calorie diet. A simple way to identify saturated fats is to observe how foods behave at room temperature. If it’s solid at room temperature, like butter, it has a high saturated fat content. If it is liquid at room temperature, like olive oil, it has more unsaturated fats.

Reading nutrition labels is another essential skill emphasized in the guidelines, particularly for individuals managing conditions such as hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, or diabetes. The guidelines further call for reducing highly processed foods, which often contribute excess calories from fat and added sugars while offering fewer essential nutrients. Alcohol intake should be limited, and sodium consumption should remain below 2,300 milligrams per day, with lower limits recommended for some individuals. Ultimately, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans are designed to provide a flexible foundation for healthy eating that can be adapted to individual preferences, cultures, and health needs.

Information comes from Kansas State University Publications.