



EXTENSION

FCS-3630

How are dietary guidelines for Americans developed?

September 2026

Introduction

Nutrition plays an important role in health. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) help people make healthy food choices and lower their risk of disease. Two federal agencies created the DGA:

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

In this fact sheet, we refer to them as the DGA. The DGA gives science-based advice about what to eat and drink. They aim to:

- Support good health
- Help people get the nutrients they need
- Lower the risk of long-term diseases

The guidelines are written for policymakers and program leaders. However, they also shape many food and health programs. Schools, communities and health educators use them across the country.

History of the guidelines

- The DGA began in 1977 with a report called the Dietary Goals for the United States. It is also known as the McGovern Report. This report used the best science available at the time.
- In 1979, the Surgeon General released a report called Healthy People. It showed how diet affects health and disease. These early efforts led to the first Dietary Guidelines in 1980.
- In 1985, the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) was formed. This group includes experts in nutrition and health. They review research and give advice based on science.

Congress requires USDA and HHS to update the guidelines every five years. This keeps the advice current. Today, the DGA guides programs that reach about one in four Americans. The most recent version covers 2025–2030.

How the guidelines are developed

The DGA follows a clear process that takes five years. Most of the science review happens in the last two to three years. The process uses national tracking systems. These systems collect data on what people eat as well as their health conditions. The DGAC reviews this information. Members are experts in nutrition, public health and medicine. Each member has at least 10 years of experience. People can be nominated by the public or apply themselves.

Scientific review process

The DGAC uses several methods to review scientific evidence. These methods help ensure the guidelines are based on strong and reliable research. The committee uses three main approaches:

- Analysis of national data: Examines eating patterns and health trends in the U.S.
- Food pattern modeling: Looks at how changes in diets affect nutrient intake
- Careful reviews of studies: Carefully analyze multiple research studies on diet and health

Together, these approaches help the DGAC evaluate the available science and develop evidence-based recommendations.

Throughout this process, the committee holds public meetings, invites public comments and produces a Scientific Report that is reviewed by other scientists.

From science to policy

USDA and HHS use the DGAC's Scientific Report to develop the final guidelines. They also consider public input and real-world factors. Once published, the DGA are used to:

- Guide federal nutrition programs
- Support health initiatives
- Develop educational resources

Together, the guidelines provide a consistent, science-based framework that supports healthy eating and improves the nation's health.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President for Agricultural Programs and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. September 2026 SS.