

## DGAs: Changing Diet to Prevent Disease & Reduce Cancer Risk

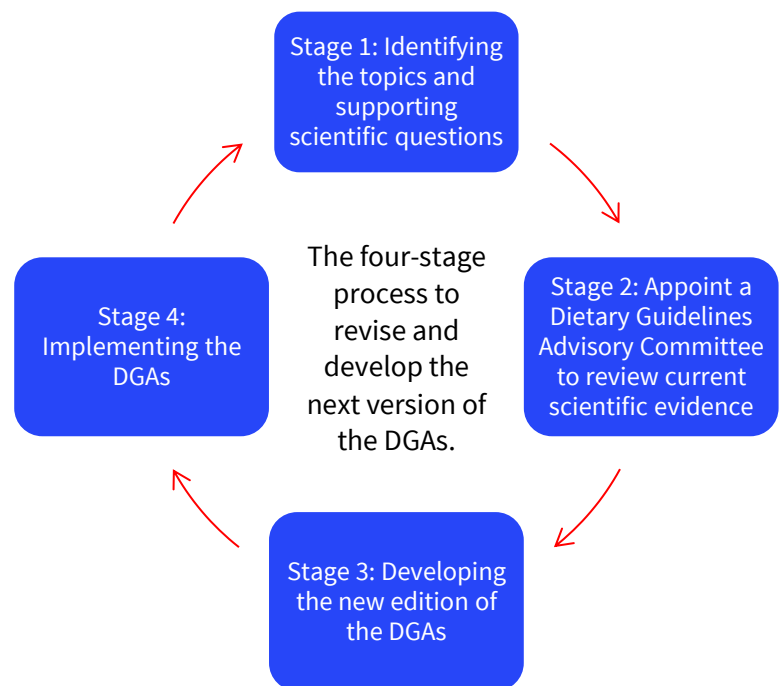
Despite the evidence linking excess weight, poor nutrition, excess alcohol consumption, and physical inactivity to increased cancer risk, most Americans do not meet recommended nutrition and physical activity targets.<sup>1</sup> Social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors strongly influence individual choices about diet and physical activity. The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) supports giving people tools, such as the *U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGAs), to make healthful food and beverage choices.

### What are the DGAs?

Jointly issued by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS), the DGAs are intended to help all Americans eat a healthier diet to reduce the risk of chronic disease. Based on the latest scientific evidence, the DGAs provide a framework for healthcare providers, nutrition educators, policymakers, and other public health professionals as well as local, state, and federal disease prevention and nutrition programs on healthier food choices.

The passage of the National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act in 1990 requires the USDA and HHS to publish a scientifically based nutritional and dietary information and guideline joint report for the public. There are four specific stages to develop the DGAs. The process to revise these guidelines is the responsibility of the USDA and HHS. However, from time to time, Congress has voted on bills, including the Farm Bill or the Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill, that have impacted the DGAs and House and Senate Appropriations Committees have directed the amount of funding available for the development and implementation of the DGA.

For the first time, the DGAs 2020-2025 version included more focused recommendations to prevent the leading diet-related chronic diseases, including cancer, and life stage specific recommendations from infancy to older adulthood.



## Why are the DGAs Important?

The DGAs can help Americans lead a healthy lifestyle, including lowering their risk of cancer, and form the basis of all federal nutrition policies and programs. They also inform many private and state and local initiatives on nutrition. For instance, the nutritious meals and snacks provided as part of the school breakfast and lunch programs offered throughout the country are required to meet the DGAs.

Recommending Americans follow a healthy dietary pattern during all life stages, the DGAs 2020-2025 edition define a healthy dietary pattern as one that includes: vegetables of all types—dark green, red and orange, beans, peas, lentils, starchy and other vegetables; fruits, especially whole fruits; grains where at least half of which are whole grains; dairy, including fat-free or low fat milk, yogurt, and cheese and/or lactose-free versions or fortified soy alternatives; protein foods such as lean meats, poultry, eggs, seafood, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds and soy products; and oils including vegetable oils and oils in foods such as seafood and nuts. In contrast, a healthy dietary pattern limits foods and beverages higher in added sugars, saturated fat, sodium, and limits alcohol.

## ACS's Dietary Guidelines



Poor diet, including the consumption of high-calorie foods and beverages, is a major contributor to excess weight and increases the risk of cancer. The American Cancer Society (ACS) recently published an updated *Guideline for Diet and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention*.<sup>ii</sup> The ACS guidelines recommend following a healthy eating pattern at all ages to reduce cancer risk. ACS guidelines are very similar to the DGAs 2020-2025 edition. The only exception is that for cancer prevention, it is best not to drink alcohol,<sup>iii</sup> whereas the DGAs only currently suggest limiting alcohol intake. Recent research has found that non-smoking adults who followed the ACS guidelines for weight control, diet, physical activity, and alcohol consumption lived longer and had a lower risk of dying from cancer and cardiovascular disease.<sup>iv, v</sup> In addition, to reduce risk for recurrence and mortality among cancer survivors, the ACS also recently released *Guidelines for Nutrition and Physical Activity Guideline for Cancer Survivors*,<sup>vi</sup> which includes nutrition and physical activity recommendations during cancer care and following recovery from treatment.

## ACS and ACS CAN's Role in the DGAs

Using the ACS guidelines, ACS and ACS CAN strongly advocate that the DGAs reflect the current science regarding diet, physical activity, and cancer risk. We advocate at each stage to ensure the DGAs address the scientific factors that would reduce cancer cases and deaths. Some of our priorities related to the DGAs include:

- strategies to support the adoption of healthy meal patterns;
- an examination of ultra-processed foods;
- recognizing the health impacts of red and processed meat;
- recommendations related to alcohol consumption;

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- examining the relationship between anthropometric outcomes and beverages and added sugar consumption;
- providing initiatives that address the unique challenges and barriers that certain groups experience (e.g., people of color, people with limited incomes) and assisting them in achieving a healthy diet and weight; and
- addressing food insecurity.

For more information on ACS CAN’s advocacy work around healthy eating and active living environments, please visit <https://www.fightcancer.org/what-we-do/healthy-eating-and-active-living>.

## References

<sup>i</sup> Kushi, 2012.

<sup>ii</sup> Rock, CL et al. American Cancer Society guideline for diet and physical activity for cancer prevention. *CA Cancer J Clin* 2020; 0:1-27.

<sup>iii</sup> Rock, CL et al. American Cancer Society guideline for diet and physical activity for cancer prevention. *CA Cancer J Clin* 2020; 0:1-27.

<sup>iv</sup> Kohler LN, Garcia DO, and Harris RB. Adherence to Diet and Physical Activity Cancer Prevention Guidelines and Cancer Outcomes: A Systematic Review. *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev* 2016; 25(7): 1018-28.

<sup>v</sup> McCullough ML, Patel AV, Kushi LH, et al. Following Cancer Prevention Guidelines Reduces Risk of Cancer, Cardiovascular Disease, and All-Cause Mortality. *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev* 2011; 20(6): 1089-97.

<sup>vi</sup> Rock, CL, Thomson, CA, Sullivan, KR, Howe, CL, Kushi, LH, Caan, BJ, Neuhouser, ML, Bandera, EV, Wang, Y, Robien, K, Basen-Engquist, KM, Brown, JC, Courneya, KS, Crane, TE, Garcia, DO, Grant, BL, Hamilton, KK, Hartman, SJ, Kenfield, SA, Martinez, ME, Meyerhardt, JA, Nekhlyudov, L, Overholser, L, Patel, AV, Pinto, BM, Platek, ME, Rees-Punia, E, Spees, CK, Gapstur, SM, McCullough, ML. American Cancer Society nutrition and physical activity guideline for cancer survivors. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.3322/caac.21719>.