CAPROCK STRATEGIES

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025–2030

Overview of the Final Recommendations and Key Themes

OVERVIEW

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services released the **2025-30 Dietary Guidelines for Americans**, the federal government's primary nutrition framework. The guidelines are intended to inform federal nutrition programs, institutional food standards, health education, and broader public-sector decision-making. While advisory, they shape policy, procurement standards and public discourse across the food, agriculture, health and consumer goods sectors.

Updated every five years, the guidelines provide evidence-based recommendations to promote health and reduce chronic disease risk. This edition is intended to take a more consumer-facing approach, emphasizes real food and nutrient density, and calls for reducing highly processed foods. It prioritizes whole foods across major food groups, places greater emphasis on protein and full-fat dairy, and emphasizes reduction or elimination of added sugars, refined carbohydrates and sugar-sweetened beverages. Although the guidelines do not regulate products or impose industry requirements, they serve as the foundation for school meals and other nutrition assistance programs, institutional procurement and nutrition education, and they inform state and local policies and private-sector standards.

THE BASICS: THE FRAMEWORK OF THE 2025 - 2030 DGAS AND A NEW PYRAMID

The DGAs are organized around a simple, repeated principle: Americans should prioritize whole, minimally processed, nutrient-dense foods. "The message is simple: eat real food," spokespersons said during the White House announcement Jan. 7.

The core dietary pattern emphasized includes consuming:

- **High-quality protein foods** from animal and plant sources
    - This includes protein from animal sources such as eggs, poultry, seafood, pork, and red meat, as well as plant-based sources such as beans, lentils, legumes, nuts, seeds, and soy.
- **Dairy**, including full-fat dairy with no added sugars
- **Vegetables and fruits**
- **Healthy fats** from whole food sources

    - Consumption is encouraged through the consumption of meats, seafood, eggs, nuts, seeds, full-fat dairy, olives, and avocados. The DGAs do maintain the recommendations that Americans consume less than 10% of their daily calories from saturated fats.
- **Whole grains**, while sharply recommending the reduction of refined carbohydrates.

While dramatically reducing consumption of "highly processed foods" that contain:

- Refined carbohydrates
    - The DGAs explicitly call for significant reductions in the consumption of white bread, packaged breakfast products, flour tortillas, and crackers.
- Added sugars or non-nutritive sweeteners
- Excess sodium
    - Sodium intake limits were maintained with guidance tailored by age groups and recognition given to individuals whose needs may differ based on high activity level.
    - In many places throughout the DGAs, it is recommended to flavor with salt, spices, and herbs where consumers prefer.
- Unhealthy fats
- Chemical additives

This framework marks a shift away from prior federal nutrition advice that emphasized low-fat dietary patterns. The DGAs repeatedly note that most calories should come from foods that naturally provide essential nutrients, with limited to zero room for foods higher in added sugars, refined carbohydrates, non-nutritive sweeteners, artificial flavors, dyes, preservatives, and sodium.

Alongside the release of the DGAs, the Trump administration introduced a **new inverted food pyramid**, which will likely replace **MyPlate** as the primary consumer-facing visual. The updated pyramid places "Protein, Dairy, and Healthy Fats" and "Vegetables and Fruits" at the top, occupying the largest share of the visual and signaling these foods should form the foundation of most meals. The pyramid reflects multiple appropriate forms or sources of fruits and vegetables, including fresh, dried, canned, and frozen products. Whole grains now appear at the bottom of the pyramid and represent the smallest portion, reflecting a shift away from grains as the dietary anchor and toward their role as a smaller, supporting food group.

Treatment of Food Forms and Accessibility

The 2025–2030 DGAs generally recognize that healthy dietary patterns must be achievable across populations. Consistent with prior editions, the DGAs explicitly state that frozen, dried, and canned vegetables and fruits with no or very limited added sugars are acceptable options. At the same time, the document places increased emphasis on consuming foods “in their original form,” particularly when discussing fruits and vegetables. Acceptability of different food forms is tied primarily to nutrient composition and added ingredients, rather than format.

Added Sugars, Highly Processed Foods, and Beverages

The strongest and most restrictive language in the 2025–2030 DGAs relates to added sugars and highly processed foods. Notably, the DGAs reflect a shift from the "ultra-processed foods" (UPFs) terminology to "highly processed foods," a move reflecting ongoing debate over a uniform UPF definition. The DGAs advise avoiding foods and beverages that are high in added sugars, refined carbohydrates, sodium, and chemical additives, such as non-nutritive

sweeteners. Sugar-sweetened beverages, such as sodas, fruit drinks, and energy drinks are explicitly discouraged, and water and unsweetened beverages are identified as the preferred options for hydration. The DGAs do make clear that some foods and drinks, such as fruits and plain milk, have naturally occurring sugars. The sugars in these foods are not considered added sugars.

Notably, the DGAs state no amount of added sugars or non-nutritive sweeteners is recommended as part of a healthy diet, and introduce a per-meal reference point suggesting that, if people choose to consume added sugars, one meal should contain no more than 10 grams of added sugars. The document also references FDA "Healthy" claim thresholds as benchmarks for certain snack foods, signaling closer alignment between dietary guidance and regulatory frameworks. For example, grain snacks (e.g., crackers) should not exceed 5 grams of added sugar per ¾ ounce whole-grain equivalent, and dairy snacks (e.g., yogurt) should not exceed 2.5 grams of added sugar per ⅔ cup equivalent.

Alcohol

The 2025-2030 DGAs emphasize that consuming less alcohol is better for health. The DGAs remove the recommended drinks per day from previous editions and frame alcohol consumption as a risk factor that should be avoided. The DGAs identify certain populations that should avoid alcohol entirely, such as individuals who are pregnant, trying to become pregnant, those with certain medical conditions, and individuals with a history of substance abuse.

Life-Stage Approach and Special Populations

The DGAs continue to employ a lifespan approach with tailored guidance for infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, pregnancy, lactation, and older age. The most restrictive guidance on added sugars applies to children with repeated recommendations to avoid added sugars during infancy and early childhood and strong language discouraging sugary drinks for adolescents. The DGAs state that no amount of added sugars are recommended for children under 10 years of age.

Across life stages, the DGAs emphasize protein intake, nutrient density, and dietary patterns that support growth, metabolic health, and chronic disease prevention. Full-fat dairy is highlighted as an important source of energy and nutrients, particularly for children.

SIDE-BY-SIDE: COMPARISON WITH THE 2020 - 2025 GUIDELINES

The 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans represent a significant shift in tone and emphasis from the 2020–2025 edition while retaining a common structural foundation. Both editions are built around the concept of healthy dietary patterns across the lifespan and emphasize nutrient-dense foods as the core of a healthy diet. However, the newest DGAs adopt a more direct posture, place greater emphasis on "real food" and minimally processed eating, and use stringent language around added sugars, refined carbohydrates, and highly processed foods.

The 2020–2025 Guidelines emphasized flexibility, customization, and moderation within calorie limits with a clear focus on substitution and incremental change. The 2025 - 2030 Guidelines have now evolved from a moderation-based framework toward a more prescriptive, values-driven narrative. This is one of the most distinctive differences between the two editions.

From Moderation to Reduction

The 2020–2025 DGAs framed dietary improvement primarily through moderation and substitution, noting that small amounts of added sugars, saturated fat, or sodium could be incorporated into nutrient-dense foods to help meet food group recommendations. Limits were expressed quantitatively, such as keeping added sugars below 10 percent of daily calories starting at age two.

By contrast, the 2025–2030 Guidelines adopt stronger and more categorical language, especially when pertaining to added sugars. The newer DGAs emphasize “dramatic reduction” of highly processed foods and state that no amount of added sugars or non-nutritive sweeteners is recommended as part of a healthy diet.

The previous edition of the DGAs allowed room for discretionary calories, including from added sugars. These are dramatically reduced or eliminated in the current version.

Food Groups and Nutrients

The 2020–2025 DGAs organized dietary patterns around familiar food groups with an emphasis on low-fat or fat-free dairy and lean protein sources. Whole grains were prioritized, but refined grains were not categorically discouraged so long as overall patterns met nutrient needs.

In the 2025–2030 DGAs, protein receives substantially greater emphasis, including explicit intake targets at every meal tied to body weight and repeated references to animal-source proteins. Dairy guidance also shifted meaningfully. Full-fat dairy is elevated as a recommended option when it contains no added sugars or sweeteners.

Whole grains remain recommended, but the newer DGAs place sharper focus on reducing refined carbohydrates and packaged grain products. In the Scientific Foundation Report that accompanied the DGAs, refined grains are referred to as “sugar in disguise” and urges consumers to choose whole grains, beans, or vegetables instead. Refined grains are also listed as one of the first indicators that a food product is considered “highly processed,” for which the DGAs call for a dramatic reduction in consumption.

Added Sugars and Highly Processed Foods

Added sugars represent a clear area of distinction. The 2020–2025 DGAs framed added sugars as a component to limit within an overall calorie budget, allowing for limited inclusion in nutrient-dense foods and beverages. The emphasis was on staying within daily limits of less

than 10 percent of calories per day starting at age 2 rather than eliminating added sugars entirely.

The 2025–2030 DGAs removed the daily percentage caps and instead introduced meal-level reference points described above, along with explicit avoidance guidance for sugar-sweetened beverages. While the 2020–2025 Guidelines recommended avoiding added sugars for children under the age of two, the new DGAs recommend no added sugar consumption until the child reaches adolescence at age 11. Added sugars are also consistently grouped with refined carbohydrates, sodium, and chemical additives as markers of highly processed foods.

Non-nutritive sweeteners, artificial flavors, dyes, and preservatives are addressed more critically in the 2025–2030 DGAs than previous editions. Unlike past federal nutrition guidance, the new DGAs signal skepticism toward reformulation strategies that have relied on ingredient substitution with chemical additives as opposed to food replacement.

Food Forms, Flexibility, and Accessibility

Both editions recognize that healthy dietary patterns can be achieved using a variety of food forms. The 2020–2025 DGAs explicitly emphasized customization based on preferences, culture, and budget, and repeatedly acknowledged the role of affordability and access in shaping food choices.

The 2025–2030 DGAs continue to acknowledge frozen, dried, and canned fruits and vegetables as acceptable options when low in added sugars, but also place emphasis on consuming foods in their “original form” and on minimizing processing.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Historically, the release of the DGAs marks the beginning of policy and program activity. Not the end. Federal agencies will begin updating program guidance, education materials, and procurement standards to align with the 2025–2030 recommendations. State and local governments, advocacy organizations, and private-sector stakeholders are also likely to reference the DGAs in shaping policies, standards, and messaging. During the press conference announcing the release of the DGAs, USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins and HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced that major changes to the school meal program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program were coming soon. Later that same day, Kyle Diamantas, the Deputy Commissioner for Human Foods at the Food and Drug Administration, said that a definition of ultra-processed foods will be a 2026 deliverable, despite earlier skepticism a definition will successfully be developed.

For industries affected by nutrition policy, the most consequential impacts will emerge through interpretation and implementation, rather than through the text of the DGAs alone. Monitoring how the DGAs are operationalized across federal programs and public discourse will be critical in the months ahead.