As we transition from 2020 into 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect nearly every aspect of our lives. For many, this health crisis has created a range of unique and individual impacts—including food access issues, income disruptions, and emotional distress.

Although we do not have concrete evidence regarding specific dietary factors that can reduce risk of COVID-19, we do know that maintaining a healthy lifestyle is critical to keeping our immune system strong. Beyond immunity, research has shown that individuals following five key habits—eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, keeping a healthy body weight, not drinking too much alcohol, and not smoking—live more than a decade longer than those who don’t. Plus, maintaining these practices may not
only help us live longer, but also better. Adults following these five key habits at middle-age were found to **live more years free of chronic diseases** including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.

While sticking to healthy habits is often easier said than done, we created this guide with the goal of providing some tips and strategies that may help. During these particularly uncertain times, we invite you to do what you can to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and hopefully (if you’re able to try out a new recipe or exercise, or pick up a fulfilling hobby) find some enjoyment along the way.

The Healthy Living Guide 2020/2021 features a mix of new and updated content from The Nutrition Source, with a focus on tips and strategies for developing healthy habits—ranging from mindful eating and staying active, to getting a good night’s rest.

The editorial team for the Guide includes **Frank Hu, MD, PhD** Chair; **Fredrick J. Stare Professor of Nutrition and Epidemiology; Lilian Cheung, ScD, RD** Lecturer; **Director of Health Promotion and Communication; Brett Otis, ALM** Nutrition Communications Project Manager; **Nancy Oliveira, MS, RD** Science Writer; **Aviva Musicus, ScD** Postdoctoral Research Fellow.

Download the printable guide at: [https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/2021/01/19/healthy-living-guide-2020-2021/](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/2021/01/19/healthy-living-guide-2020-2021/)

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**Dr Eric Rimm Assesses the Latest U.S. Dietary Guidelines**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture recently released its **2020 – 2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.** 9th Edition. December 2020. ([Available at](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/) In a recent interview, **Dr Eric Rimm**, Professor in the Departments of Epidemiology and Nutrition at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, who served on the Scientific Advisory Committee in 2010, was asked to discuss the new 2020-2025 U.S. Dietary Guidelines.

When asked for his assessment of the new guidelines, Rimm stated that this is the first time that the guidelines include advice for children under two and that they now actually address healthy eating across the lifespan. This time the government made a conscious effort to include more pediatricians on the advisory committee, including **Dr Elsie Taiveras**, who has an appointment in our Department of Nutrition. Rimm, however, was disappointed that the government decided to take a pass on changing recommendations for daily calories from added sugar.

Rimm is satisfied that the committee did not change its previous alcohol guidelines of up to two drinks per day for men and one for women as he believes that the science still supports its previous recommendations. He wants to remind people, however, that pandemic or not, binge drinking is still harmful.

Unfortunately, the guidelines are primarily aimed at policy makers and academics, so people may find some of the recommendations difficult to translate to their own lives. Rimm suggests that instead of counting calories, perhaps it would be more helpful if people focused on eating whole foods instead of
processed foods. And to choose healthier proteins—chicken and fish over red meat, or soy proteins over animal proteins.

Although much of the guidelines do discuss healthy dietary patterns including the Mediterranean Diet or vegetarian diet, food could be made more affordable by buying inexpensive proteins like dried beans, and also by incorporating frozen fruits and vegetables into a person’s diet.

Rimm hopes that future guidelines incorporate more sustainability; for example, encouraging a more plant-based diet to lower the production of greenhouse gases and notes that this has been much better addressed in the recent EAT-Lancet report. He remains hopeful that standards around school meals set during the Obama administration, such as lowering amounts of saturated fat and sodium, will be restored under the Biden administration. Another important area is the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); incentives must be provided to help people on SNAP buy healthier food.

To read the full interview with Dr Rimm: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/features/assessing-the-latest-u-s-dietary-guidelines/

A more detailed look at highlights from the new Guidelines, and where they fall short: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/2021/01/12/2020-dietary-guidelines/

NEWS FROM AROUND THE NUTRITION DEPARTMENT

PUBLICATIONS

Dr Marta Guasch-Ferré, Research Scientist, and colleagues published a paper on Walnut Consumption, Plasma Metabolomics, and Risk of Type 2 Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease in the Journal of Nutrition. In brief, the authors identified a metabolite profile including 19 metabolites that was associated with walnut consumption and with a lower risk of incident T2D and CVD in a Mediterranean population at high cardiovascular risk from the PREDIMED Study. The paper is of interest because they are continuing to unravel some of the complex associations between dietary factors, metabolomics, and risk of chronic diseases. Also, these types of studies are one of the first steps to be able to identify objective biomarkers of diet that would be complementary with the traditional dietary assessment methods.


In partnership with Dr Sara Bleich (Department of Health Policy and Management) and Dr Sheila Fleischhacker (Georgetown University), Mary Kathryn Poole (doctoral student) published a Perspective paper Addressing Child Hunger When School Is Closed — Considerations during the Pandemic and Beyond in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM). This paper summarizes current gaps in ensuring food security for children during weekends and instructional breaks as well as potential policy solutions amid the pandemic and beyond.

PRESENTATIONS

Dr Kazuko Yoshizawa, Visiting Scientist, presented “Validity and reproducibility of a food frequency questionnaire to assess the consumption of fatty acids and antioxidants in a Japanese population” at Online Summit on Cardiology and Cardiovascular Diseases 2020|Dec.10,2020. Drs Laila Al-Shaar and Walter Willett were co-presenters.

INNOVATIONS

In early March, 2020, Dr Anne Lusk, Research Scientist, sent a Letter of Intent to the Hamilton Company Charitable Foundation to work with high school students on climate change initiatives and, in June 2020, received a gift from the foundation. With COVID and the inability to work with students in person, Dr Lusk wrote, in lay terms, material for a website about electric cars and charging stations on the side of the house or on a post in the driveway. The website included aesthetic designs for home charging stations to increase property values. Dr Lusk is grateful to Brett Otis for helping to create the following website: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/electric-cars/. One section of this website identified how high school students could be engaged: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/eleccars/other-benefits-considerations/high-school-students-electric-cars/

In December, 2020, Nicolas Gentile, a high school student in Sandwich, MA, emailed Dr Lusk about her course, “Built Environment, Human Transportation, Public Health, and Climate Change.” He had founded the Massachusetts Climate Education Organization, a student-led youth organization dedicated to improving environmental education in all K-12 classes throughout Massachusetts. Dr Lusk asked him to work with her on the electric car initiative. He put together a survey https://forms.gle/eAKdvyahpD1u2nT78 for student and teacher feedback about the initiatives listed in Dr Lusk’s website.

One hundred and twenty-nine responses to the survey came in from 17 schools, and 52% indicated they want to work with their schools to have electric buses; 50% want to identify locations for electric car charging stations in apartments and condominium complexes. Additionally, 39% want to become knowledgeable about electric cars and recharging stations because, as with the introduction of the computer and cell phone, they are the “expert” in the house. For next steps, 58% want project and activity ideas for high school students regarding EV’s and climate change and 53% want a website for student engagement (videos, worksheets, etc.). Dr Lusk and Nicolas Gentile are working on a Letter of Intent to the Hamilton Company to carry out the next steps.
**NEW FACULTY APPOINTMENTS**

*Dr Shilpa Bhilpathiraju*, PhD, was appointed Assistant Professor in the Department of Nutrition (Secondary). Prior to this appointment, Dr Bhupathiraju was a Research Scientist in the Department. As an Assistant Professor, she will conduct research related to diet, lifestyle, and chronic disease prevention among South Asians and US populations. In particular, she will continue to investigate the role of diet and lifestyle in cardiometabolic prevention in cohorts here in the US, including the Nurses’ Health Study I, Nurses’ Health Study II, the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study, the SOALS study, the Boston Puerto Rican Health Study, and the MASALA study. Shilpa will continue to actively establish collaborations with researchers in India and in the US to examine the dietary and lifestyle predictors of cardiometabolic diseases among South Asians and will continue to participate in the training, mentoring, and supervision of students and postdoctoral fellows working in the proposed research area.

**MORE NUTRITION NEWS**

**Saturated Fats Remain a Continuous Debate**

According to a January 20, 2021 article in *Men’s Health*, the debate over the role saturated fats play in the development of heart disease has permeated academia, government, industry, and even pop culture. *Dr Walter Willett*, Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, was prominently featured in the article.

Willett discussed his research, the challenges of conducting large-scale and rigorous nutrition studies, and his critics. He noted that his studies have consistently shown that when it comes to heart disease, saturated fats—which are found primarily in meat and dairy products—aren’t necessarily bad but they’re not necessarily good. Willett states that “It’s really about comparison. If you compare saturated fat to trans fats, then saturated fat looks good. But if you compare it to unsaturated fats, then saturated fat looks bad.”

*Read the Men’s Health article:* [https://www.menshealth.com/nutrition/a35103720/saturated-fat-good-or-bad/](https://www.menshealth.com/nutrition/a35103720/saturated-fat-good-or-bad/)


**Risk of Fatty Liver Disease May Be Reduced by a Green Mediterranean Diet**

According to a new study co-authored by researchers from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, a form of the Mediterranean diet including more green plant matter may reduce the risk of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease by half. The study was published January 18, 2021 in *Gut*. Senior author was *Dr Iris Shai*, Adjunct Professor of Nutrition at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Evidence showed that the green Mediterranean diet was found to reduce liver fat more than the other two healthy diets tested during the study. During an 18-month clinical trial, the researchers followed 294 adults with abdominal obesity. They were divided into three groups with different dietary regimens: standard nutritional counseling, a Mediterranean diet, and the green Mediterranean diet. Even though all three groups lost liver fat, those participants in the green Mediterranean diet group had the greatest
reduction. This group dropped an average of 39% of liver fat compared to a 20% reduction with the traditional Mediterranean diet, and 12% with standard nutritional counseling.

Shai found in an earlier study that the green Mediterranean diet could also aid weight loss and provide cardiometabolic benefits.


**MONDAY NUTRITION SEMINARS**

The Department of Nutrition holds its weekly **Monday Nutrition Seminar Series** every Monday throughout the academic year. The talks are varied, but they highlight the many different aspects of cutting-edge research that is currently being conducted in the fields of nutrition and global public health. These seminars are held from **1:00-1:50 pm** and are free and open to the public. Because of COVID-19, the seminars have been presented via Zoom since March of this past spring, and this zoom format will continue in the fall of 2020. A zoom link for viewing will be available one week prior to each seminar.

**Our February speakers will be:**

**Feb 1**  
*Dr. Ashkan Afshin, MD, MPH, MSc, ScD*, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Global Health; Assistant Professor, Health Metrics Sciences, University of Washington – "*Estimating the Burden of Disease Related to Multiple Micronutrient Deficiencies*” – NGHP

**Feb 8**  
*Dr Angela Odoms-Young, PhD*, Associate Professor, Kinesiology and Nutrition, Institute for Health Research & Policy, Department of Kinesiology and Nutrition, University of Illinois at Chicago – TBD

**Feb 15**  
**PRESIDENTS DAY**

**Feb 22**  
*Dr Christopher Golden, PhD*, Assistant Professor of Nutrition & Planetary Health, Department of Nutrition – "Aquatic Foods for Nourishing Nations"

**NUTRITION SOURCE UPDATES**

**Food Feature: Tea**
Learn more about one of the most popular beverages worldwide:  
https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/food-features/tea/

*If you would like to remain current as to what is happening in the field of nutrition, please be sure to view our Nutrition Source website for the latest updates!*  
(See: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/)
For more information on this event and how to register, contact: Dr Sabri Bromage at sbromage@mail.harvard.edu

REGISTER TO ATTEND
Launch Event
February 23
9:30–11:30am EST

Global Diet Quality Score
A New Method to Collect and Analyze Data on Diet Quality

This remote launch event will include a series of presentations to describe final results of work to develop and validate the Global Diet Quality Score (GDQS), a new metric of diet quality appropriate for use in low- and middle-income countries. Participants will have an opportunity to learn about a GDQS-focused supplement submitted to the Journal of Nutrition and to preview the technology assisted data collection system that has been developed for collecting GDQS data in population-based surveys.

Register here to attend the launch event. Questions about the event can be sent to feedback@intake.org. Up-to-date information about the event will also be available at intake.org.

The GDQS research initiative was launched by Intake – Center for Dietary Assessment. The research was led by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition and carried out in collaboration with researchers at the National Public Health Institute (INSP), Mexico. Funding for the research was provided by FHI Solutions, recipient of a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant to support Intake – Center for Dietary Assessment.
Teaching Kitchen Research Conference

November 11-12, 2020
February 7, 2018

Recorded Videos of the following 2020 sessions are available to watch:

Welcome Remarks, David Eisenberg, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

Plenary 1, Frank Hu, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

Plenary 2, Richard Rothstein, Dartmouth Medical School

Plenary 3, Nicole Farmer, National Institutes of Health

Plenary 4, Ruthie Schwab, Google and Zoe Schweitzer, Compass at Google

Additional online resources supported by this conference:

- Dr. Eisenberg’s Overview Article of the 2020 Teaching Kitchen Research Conference published in Journal of Alternative and Complimentary Medicine
- Abstracts published in Journal of Alternative and Complimentary Medicine
- Open Access “Teaching Kitchens in the Learning and Work Environments: The Future is Now” published in Global Advances in Health and Medicine
- The Mental Health Benefits of Cooking – NIH Intramural Research Program
- Food is Medicine Map