

LATEST NEWS

Report may inform first dietary guidelines for Americans from birth to 24 months

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health & Human Services aim to release new dietary guidelines by the end of 2020. For the first time, the guidelines are mandated to include dietary recommendations from birth to 24 months and for women who are pregnant or lactating.



Bonnie Becker/MDedge News

An advisory committee submitted to the agencies a [scientific report](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/2020-advisory-committee-report) [<https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/2020-advisory-committee-report>](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/2020-advisory-committee-report) that examines relationships between diet and health at various life stages. Four chapters focus on dietary considerations for infants and toddlers, and two chapters focus on diet during pregnancy and lactation.

The report may inform the development of the new guidelines. The advisory committee's recommendations include introducing infants to foods that are rich in zinc and iron at about age 6 months and having women who are

lactating eat sources of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, such as fish, to improve the fatty acid status of infants.

Ahead of the release of the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, [Joan Younger Meek, MD](https://med.fsu.edu/orlando/directory/associate-dean) , discussed parts of the scientific report at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics, held virtually this year.

While the 2015-2020 guidelines use [ChooseMyPlate](https://www.choosemyplate.gov/) to help people implement the recommendations, it is not known how the new guidelines will be presented to the public, she said. “Many of you will remember the pyramids earlier and different food groups before that.”

Promote healthy dietary patterns

The advisory committee’s report notes that diet in the first years of life contributes to long-term health and shapes taste preferences, said Dr. Meek, professor of clinical sciences at Florida State University, Orlando. Human milk or infant formula are primary sources of nutrition until approximately 6 months, when families may introduce complementary foods and beverages. Between 6 months and 24 months, children transition to the typical family diet.

Dr. Meek highlighted some of the advisory committee’s findings and recommendations.

Infants who are ever breastfed have a reduced risk of overweight or obesity, type 1 diabetes, and asthma. Likewise, longer duration of breastfeeding is associated with lower risk of type 1 diabetes and asthma, and exclusive breastfeeding is associated with lower risk of type 1 diabetes.

- Complementary foods and beverages should not be introduced before age 4 months. Limited evidence indicates that their introduction before 4 months may be associated with increased odds of overweight or obesity. Introducing complementary foods or beverages at 4 or 5 months, compared with 6 months, is not associated with long-term advantages or disadvantages.
- Introducing peanut and egg after age 4 months may reduce the risk of food allergies.
- From age 12 months to 24 months, children should consume a variety of nutrient-rich protein sources from animals – including meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, and dairy – plus nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables, and grains.
- The report prioritizes oils over solid fats, and whole grains over refined grains. It also discourages added sugars, particularly from sugar-sweetened beverages. Other sources of added sugars include sweets, baked goods, and sweetened dairy products.

The report acknowledges that dietary guidelines should accommodate cultural preferences and cost considerations.

Recommendations during pregnancy

Healthy dietary patterns before or during pregnancy may modestly reduce the odds of gestational diabetes, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, and preterm birth, according to the report.

The report recommends that during pregnancy women consume 8-12 ounces per week of seafood with high levels of omega-3 fatty acids and low levels of methylmercury, consistent with existing recommendations.

Egg and milk consumption during pregnancy does not influence the risk of food allergy, asthma, or atopic disease in the child, according to the report.

The advisory committee recommended universal folic acid supplementation during pregnancy.

Addressing a gap



Dr. Kathryn Dewey

The Agricultural Act of 2014 required that infants and toddlers and women who are pregnant or lactating be included in the 2020-2025 guidelines.

Covering these populations in the scientific report was a substantial undertaking, said [Kathryn Dewey, PhD](https://nutrition.ucdavis.edu/people/kathryn-dewey)

[<https://nutrition.ucdavis.edu/people/kathryn-dewey>](https://nutrition.ucdavis.edu/people/kathryn-dewey), of the Institute for Global Nutrition at the University of California, Davis. Dr. Dewey chaired the subcommittee on birth to 24 months for the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee.

“Given that this age group had not been covered before, we could not rely on previous dietary guidelines’ reports,” Dr. Dewey said in an interview.

Outlining food patterns for infants and toddlers proved challenging. The committee explored models that considered various scenarios including children who consumed human milk, children who consumed formula, and those with vegetarian diets. Future research should clarify dietary reference intakes for these age groups, Dr. Dewey said.

Dr. Dewey sees the committee’s report on dietary guidance for birth to 24 months as a starting point and not necessarily an exhaustive look at the subject.

For one, the committee focused more on what to feed infants and toddlers rather than on how to feed them. Information about how to feed children is considered more in depth in a 2020 [report](https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25747/feeding-infants-and-children-from-birth-to-24-months-summarizing) <<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25747/feeding-infants-and-children-from-birth-to-24-months-summarizing>> from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. That report summarizes existing guidance from various organizations on feeding infants and children from birth to 24 months. Dr. Dewey chaired the committee that created the National Academies report.

Sharing the new USDA and HHS guidelines after they are released could be the next important step. “The public does not necessarily know about the guidelines or they do not necessarily seek them out unless there is a very well-constructed strategy for dissemination and implementation,” Dr. Dewey said.

To that end, health care providers can play a role, Dr. Meek said. “Be aware of changes in guidance, adopt those new recommendations, and then advocate those with our patients as well as with the public at large.”