



## Working Together...*Dietary Guidelines*, Food Guidance System, Food Label

The ***Dietary Guidelines for Americans*** are the cornerstone of federal nutrition policy and education. They are based on what experts have determined to be the best scientific knowledge about diet, physical activity and other issues related to what we should eat and how much physical activity we need. The *Dietary Guidelines* answer the questions, "What should Americans eat, how should we prepare our food to keep it safe and wholesome, and how should we be active to be healthy?" The *Dietary Guidelines* are designed to help Americans choose diets that will meet nutrient requirements, promote health, support active lives and reduce risks of chronic disease.

The *Dietary Guidelines* are a foundation of the **Food Guidance System**, which presents the science in a consumer-friendly form that helps people to be healthier by applying the science to their own lives. The Food Guidance System updates the Food Guide Pyramid, which was released in 1992. This new educational tool incorporates the updated 2005 *Dietary Guidelines* and makes recommendations on what and how much to eat.

**Nutrition labeling** is required for most packaged foods. In the "Nutrition Facts" panel, manufacturers are required to provide information on certain nutrients. The required nutrients were selected because they address today's health concerns. The order in which they must appear reflects the priority of dietary recommendations. The serving size is the basis for the calorie and nutrient declarations on the label. The percent Daily Value (% DV) provides consumers an easy way to interpret the quantitative amounts without doing math. Another part of the food label that is important for consumers to use is the ingredient list. The ingredient list is required on all foods that have more than one ingredient. Each ingredient is listed in descending order of predominance.

The Nutrition Facts panel provides information on what is in foods and the number of servings in the package. The Nutrition Facts panel in combination with the ingredient list, the name of the food (e.g., "Whole Wheat Bread", and certain claims (e.g., "high fiber", "low fat) gives specificity so that discriminating choices can be made within and among food groups. Knowing how to interpret label facts enables consumers to accurately apply key *Dietary Guidelines* messages that correspond to the nutrients and other information listed on the Facts panel

### How do these work together?

The *Dietary Guidelines* provides information for all Americans on what makes a healthy diet. The consumer brochure, *Finding Your Way to a Healthier You: Based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, provides tested messages that motivate consumers to pursue a healthy lifestyle. The *Dietary Guidelines* provides the key recommendations that can help dietitians and their clients develop achievable, measurable goals. The Food Guidance system and food label are the tools that clients can use to meet their goals.

For example, the *Dietary Guidelines* recommends consuming 3 or more ounce-equivalents of whole grain products per day, with at least half of grains coming from whole grains. The Food Guidance System would help identify the total number of grains recommended at a client's individual calorie level. The food label, particularly the ingredient list, would help the client identify which products contain whole grains. The Nutrition Facts panel would give the consumer information to select products that are high in fiber and lower in sodium and saturated fat.

The Food Guidance System and the food label are tools that consumers can use to meet the recommendations in the *Dietary Guidelines*, and to assist dietitians in personalizing the recommendations for their clients' needs.