

## Association releases new diet and lifestyle recommendations

DALLAS, June 20 – A healthy diet and lifestyle are key weapons in the fight to prevent cardiovascular disease — the nation's No. 1 killer — according to new American Heart Association diet and lifestyle recommendations published in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

Intended for healthy Americans age 2 and older, the recommendations, which replace guidelines issued in 2000, now recommend:

- further reducing saturated and trans fatty acids in the diet;
- minimizing the intake of food and beverages with added sugars;
- emphasizing physical activity and weight control;
- eating a diet rich in vegetables, fruits and whole-grain foods;
- avoiding use of and exposure to tobacco products; and
- achieving and maintaining healthy cholesterol, blood pressure and blood glucose levels.

“The previous recommendations stressed a healthy dietary pattern; the new ones broaden that concept to include the importance of a healthy *lifestyle* pattern. The two go together — they should be inseparable,” said Alice Lichtenstein, D.Sc., chair of the American Heart Association’s Nutrition Committee and Gershoff professor of nutrition science and policy at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, at Tufts University in Boston.

“The key message of the recommendations is to focus on long-term, permanent changes in how we eat and live. The best way to lower cardiovascular risk is to combine physical activity with heart-healthy eating habits, coupled with weight control and avoiding tobacco products,” Lichtenstein said.

The association continues to emphasize achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight, but is putting more emphasis on balancing the number of calories consumed with the number of calories burned. More emphasis is put on food preparation methods that avoid adding saturated fat, sugar or salt and portion size control.

More than 90 scientific publications were reviewed by a panel of nutrition and cardiovascular disease experts for the new American Heart Association recommendations. Besides the goals and recommendations, the statement has new sections with practical information for consumers such as knowing your caloric needs, food preparation tips and some examples of dietary patterns consistent with the new recommendations.

As in the past, the recommendations also address special groups such as children, older adults, individuals with metabolic syndrome or chronic kidney disease and certain socioeconomic groups at high risk for cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Most importantly, these new recommendations address a key challenge faced by increasing numbers of Americans: maintaining a healthy dietary pattern while eating more foods prepared outside the home.

Environmental factors strongly influence how Americans eat and exercise. Accordingly, a new feature of the 2006 American Heart Association Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations is a list of ways that practitioners, restaurants, the food industry, schools and local governments can help the general public adopt these recommendations. Examples include displaying caloric content prominently on menus, reducing portion size, limiting trans fatty acids and using low-saturated-fatty-acid oils in food preparation.

Another major change in the dietary recommendations is a lower goal for saturated fat — from less than 10 percent to less than 7 percent — and establishing a goal for trans fatty acids of less than 1 percent of total calories.

“The point is not to calculate the amount of saturated and trans-fatty acids in the diet, but to choose foods that minimize your intake. For example, you can choose leaner cuts of meat and lower-fat dairy products, smaller serving sizes, avoid foods made with hydrogenated fat and include more fruits, vegetables, vegetarian options and fish in the diet,” Lichtenstein said.

Saturated fatty-acids occur naturally in foods from animals, such as meat and dairy products, and tropical oils such as coconut and palm oil.

Trans-fatty acids – which are now required to be shown on the Nutrition Facts panel of packaged foods — are commonly found in commercially baked and fried foods, such as crackers, French fries, cakes, pies, bread and cookies.

“Almost anyone can make changes in how they eat and move their bodies to bring themselves closer to the recommended goals. The changes can be small but need to be maintained. In no way are we saying people will have to give up all the things they enjoy; they just may have to make a few modifications in their current habits,” Lichtenstein said.

“A good first step to improve your diet and lifestyle — start paying attention to portion size and liquid calories, such as those in soft drinks, fruit drinks, fruit juices and alcoholic beverages. The next step is to try to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day,” Lichtenstein said. “It does not have to be done all at once — accumulating 30 minutes throughout the day is fine — and, of course, more is better. No one is too old or too out of shape to make small changes to increase physical activity.”

The association urges industry to gradually reduce the salt and sugar content of processed foods and to increase the proportion of whole grains compared to white flour in baked goods, among other recommendations.

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