

New Dietary Guidelines for Americans Ignore Critical Evidence on Alcohol and Cancer

There is strong evidence that consumption of alcoholic drinks increases the risk of six types of cancer.

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On December 29, the [United States Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA) and the [United States Department of Health and Human Services](#) (HHS) released the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These Dietary Guidelines are released every five years and form the basis of all federal food and nutrition policies, programs and communications for the next half decade.

The [American Institute for Cancer Research](#) (AICR) congratulates the USDA and HHS on the completion of a multi-year process to update these Dietary Guidelines to reflect the latest evidence on diet and health. “AICR welcomes the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans’ recommendations for a dietary pattern rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and low in sugar-sweetened foods and drinks,” said Nigel Brockton, PhD, AICR’s Vice President of Research. “These specific recommendations in the Dietary Guidelines align with AICR’s [10 Cancer Prevention Recommendations](#).”

However, AICR is disappointed that the USDA and HHS has bowed to industry pressure to not incorporate the recommendation from the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee’s Scientific Report that alcohol intake be limited to no more than one drink per day for men, on days when alcohol is consumed. Instead, the Dietary Guidelines have retained the outdated advice that men may consume up to two alcoholic drinks per day. “The Dietary Guidelines for Americans should be a blueprint for a healthy diet. Retaining this flawed advice implies that two drinks per day are safe for men; that advice is contrary to the convincing evidence that intake of even less than one drink per day elevates the risk for several cancer types, including head and neck, esophageal and breast cancers,” said Brockton. “Systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses conducted as part of the World Cancer Research Fund and AICR’s Continuous Update Project have found strong evidence that consumption of alcoholic drinks increases the risk of six types of cancer, with convincing evidence showing elevated risk with consumption of less than even one serving of alcohol per day, for some cancers.” The scientific report from the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee found that the current evidence justifies tightening the alcohol guideline for men to no

more than one drink per day, to match the recommended limit for women. AICR recommends that, for cancer prevention, it is best not to drink alcohol.

While AICR is appreciative that the new Dietary Guidelines recommend limiting added sugars and choosing unprocessed forms of meats, the recommendations do not fully reflect the research on the health benefits of reducing intake of processed meats and further reducing intake of added sugars beyond the 10 percent of calories recommended by the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines. AICR's research has [found](#) strong evidence that diets high in red and processed meat increase the risk of colorectal cancer. Added sugars provide excess calories and [increase the risk](#) for overweight and obesity, which AICR's evidence review has found is a risk factor for 12 types of cancer. The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee had recommended reducing added sugars to no more than 6 percent of total calories to help with managing weight.

AICR has been heavily engaged in monitoring and informing the multi-year process to develop the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. AICR submitted several [comment letters](#) to the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, which was charged with reviewing the scientific evidence on the connection between diet and alcohol intake and cancer risk, and to USDA and HHS in support of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee's evidence-based conclusions and recommendations.

Now that the Dietary Guidelines are released, AICR looks forward to working with the USDA and HHS to implement the guidelines to help inform nutrition policies and programs and ultimately improve Americans' eating habits. AICR's [New American Plate model](#) helps Americans eat a diet that follows AICR's Cancer Prevention Recommendations, which are similar to the Dietary Guidelines. AICR also advocates for [policies](#) that make it easy for Americans to have a healthy diet and lifestyle to reduce their cancer risk.

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