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Questionable Dietary Guidelines

THE ISSUE: The United States government introduced the Dietary Guidelines in 1980. Federal law requires the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) to review and revise the guidelines every five years. The most recent [edition](#) was published in 2020.

- According to a 2019 report by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), only [one in ten Americans meets the recommendations](#) of the U.S. Dietary Guidelines.
- The report, using data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), also found that only 9.3% of adults meet the daily recommended intake of vegetables, and only 12.2% meet the recommended intake of fruit.

Some may suggest that this is because so few follow the Guidelines. Yet, considering the negative effects that a federal recall, warning label, or even a new public health study can have on a particular product, these dietary guidelines do influence the way Americans eat.

THE CONCERNS: Although most Americans don't follow the guidelines closely, healthcare workers rely on these guidelines for nutrition advice, and all federal food assistance programs—including school feeding programs, prison menus, and military diets—are based on the guidelines. Food manufacturers also use these guidelines to formulate the back-of-the-package nutrition labels required by law.

Some markers of health risk directly related to diet have actually gotten worse since the debut of the Dietary Guidelines:

- **Obesity:** The prevalence of obesity has increased significantly in both adults and children since the 1980s. According to the [CDC](#), in 1980, only about 15% of adults in the U.S. were obese, whereas in 2023, that number had risen to over 40%. In children, the prevalence of obesity has also increased from about 7% in 1980 to over 19% in 2020, despite the fact that today, a larger percentage of children take part in school feeding programs.
- **Type II diabetes:** The incidence of type II diabetes has increased since the 1980s from about [5.5 million Americans](#) to more than [38 million](#).
- **High blood pressure:** The prevalence of high blood pressure has also increased since the 1980s, from about [18%](#) of U.S. adults to [48%](#).

In addition, the DGAC has become increasingly politicized, stacked with extreme activists to [reflect](#) “racial, ethnic, gender, and geographic diversity” over prioritizing reasonable food and drink guidelines. The most recent 2025 DGAC guidelines were [drafted](#) with a “health equity” lens in mind.

- The 20-member DGAC [encouraged](#) “plant sources of protein foods” and prioritized consumption of beans, peas, and lentils over meat.
- While the final draft didn’t mention climate considerations, activists have demanded that dietary guidelines be [informed](#) by climate change to reduce meat consumption.

THE RISKS:

The U.S. government has repeatedly changed its course on dietary guidance, resulting in confused and distrustful Americans.

- The DGAC first recommended the food pyramid, which had meat, fish, eggs, beans, fats, and oils at the small tip, with

bread, cereal, rice, and pasta at the larger bottom part of the pyramid. It's no wonder Americans got fat.

- In the late 20th century, the DGAC and other independent agencies wrongly concluded that eggs were bad for you because they contained cholesterol. Today, the FDA says cholesterol is “no longer a nutrient of concern,” and the DGAC recommends eating eggs. Quite a reversal!
- Similarly, **red meat**, **high-fat vs. low-fat**, **dairy in schools**, restrictions for pregnant women, caffeine, and more have been vilified by the DGAC.

Unfortunately, nutrition science is often flawed because many studies depend on humans self-reporting their diets. People often don't accurately report what they eat and drink, which renders many studies dubious at best.

Additionally, America's diverse population has very diverse nutritional needs, which make one-size-fits-all recommendations challenging. The creation of dietary guidance costs American taxpayers millions of dollars, and it's unclear if they are getting anything valuable in terms of public health improvement from this investment.

SOLUTIONS: The DGAC is broken, and its influence should be curtailed. Riddled with conflicts of interest and infiltrated by political activists from environmental concerns and other special interest groups, the DGAC is ill-equipped to assess the latest scientific data, making the Dietary Guidelines an unreliable source on nutrition for the American public.

Moving forward, HHS should dismantle the DGAC and develop a smaller, more agile advisory panel for assessing the latest health data. HHS should require more regular reports and updates to the American public so that they can make the best decisions for themselves and their families.

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