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# U.S. Trends in Food Availability and a Dietary Assessment of Loss-Adjusted Food Availability, 1970-2014

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## What Is the Issue?

Since 1970, the U.S. obesity rate has almost tripled for adults and more than tripled for children and adolescents. Growing concern over the health of the American population from poor dietary habits and physical inactivity has concentrated attention on the food Americans eat, as well as how Americans could better meet the Federal dietary guidelines. This report examines the amount of food available for consumption and related food trends in the United States from 1970 to 2014, using ERS' food availability data, and compares ERS' loss-adjusted food availability data (a proxy for food consumption) to the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (Guidelines)* to see whether Americans are at, above, or below dietary recommendations.

## What Did the Study Find?

Although Americans have been consuming more food overall from all of the major food groups since 1970—even fruit and vegetables—many still fall below the *Guidelines'* recommendations for certain food groups. On average, Americans consume too many foods that are high in added fats and oils, added sugar and sweeteners, and grains; and they consume too few foods and beverages that are nutrient-dense, such as vegetables, seafood, low-fat dairy products, and fruit (on the basis of a 2,000-calorie/day diet).

### *Consumption under the recommended amounts:*

- **Fruit.** In 2014, fruit availability reached 261.4 pounds per person (fresh-weight equivalent), up 10 percent from 237.6 pounds in 1970. On average, Americans consumed 0.9 cup-equivalents of fruit per day (43 percent of the recommended 2 cup-equivalents) in 2014.
- **Vegetables.** The amount of vegetables available for consumption reached 383.6 pounds (fresh-weight equivalent) in 2014, up 17 percent from 327.9 pounds per person in 1970. On average, Americans' consumption totaled 1.6 cup-equivalents of vegetables per person per day in 2014 (66 percent of the recommended 2.5 cup-equivalents).
- **Dairy.** The availability of all milk and milk products increased 9 percent, from 563.9 pounds per person (milk equivalent) in 1970 to about 614.3 pounds per person in 2014. On average, Americans consumed 1.5 cup-equivalents of milk and milk products (49 percent of the recommended 3 cup-equivalents) per day in 2014.

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### *Consumption over the recommended amounts:*

- **Grains.** The availability of grains (wheat flour, rice, corn products, oat products, and barley products) increased 28 percent, from 136.7 pounds per person in 1970 to 174.4 pounds in 2014 (rice not included after 2010). However, Americans, on average, consumed 6.7 ounce-equivalents of grains per person per day (12 percent over the recommended 6 ounce-equivalents) in 2014.
- **Protein foods.** From 1970 to 2014, the total amount of protein foods (not including seeds and soy products) available for consumption increased 1 percent, from 224.5 pounds per person to 226.6 pounds. On average, Americans consumed an estimated 7.1 ounce-equivalent of meat, poultry, fish, shellfish eggs, and nuts per person per day (29 percent over the recommended 5.5 ounce-equivalents) in 2014.
- **Added sugars and sweeteners.** In 2014, added sugars and sweeteners available for consumption totaled 131 pounds per person, up 10 percent since 1970. The *Guidelines* suggest that calories from added sugars and sweeteners should not exceed 10 percent of daily calories (200 calories or 12.5 teaspoons for a 2,000-calorie/day diet). However, Americans, on average, consumed 366 calories (roughly 23 teaspoons) of added sugars and sweeteners in 2014 (83 percent over the recommended 12.5 teaspoon limit).
- **Added fats and oils (data only available to 2010).** The availability of added fats and oils reached 82.2 pounds per person (fat-content basis) in 2010, compared with 52.5 pounds per person in 1970. In 2010, Americans, on average, consumed 63 grams of added oils per person per day. Of this amount, 44.7 grams were the recommended “healthy intake of oils,” such as olive and canola oil (66 percent over the recommended amount of 27 grams per day), and 14.7 grams were solid fats from butter, lard, shortening (animal and vegetable), and tallow.

*Note: Because of rounding, some calculations based on the numbers cited will not be precisely accurate.*

### **How Was the Study Conducted?**

This report presents trends in the amount of food available for consumption from 1970 to 2014 and estimates whether Americans’ consumption was at, above, or below the recommendations in the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* using the food availability data, the loss-adjusted food availability data, and the nutrient availability data in ERS’s Food Availability (Per Capita) Data System. The food availability data track the amount of food available for human consumption in the United States by measuring the movement of food supplies from production through marketing channels for domestic consumption. The loss-adjusted food availability data are derived from the food availability data by adjusting for spoilage and other losses at the primary, retail, and consumer levels to more closely approximate actual intake. The data are different from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) in that they do not measure actual food intake by individuals. Once adjusted for loss, the data are then converted to daily food-pattern equivalents to estimate whether Americans are at, above, or below the dietary guidelines for the food groups. The nutrient availability data use the food availability data to estimate the amounts per capita per day of calories and nutrients.