

## Making Sense of the Guidelines

### Finding your numbers

To find out how much and what type of food you should be eating for good health, try using one of the two methods discussed in this handout.

#### Counting by Grams & Milligrams

It can be hard to understand dietary guidelines written as percentages, so let's break them down into actual amounts. If you are to eat approximately 2,000 calories per day (ask your doctor or registered dietitian how many calories are right for you), here's what your numbers would look like:

**30 percent total fat would be 67 grams (g) of total fat (or less) per day**, which means that if you consume 2,000 calories a day, you should consume no more than 67 grams of total fat a day. (To figure: multiply 2,000 by 0.30 to get 600 calories, and divide that number by 9 [the number of calories per gram of fat] to get 67 grams of total fat.) Keep in mind, however, that this amount is an upper limit; most of these fat calories should come from monounsaturated and polyunsaturated sources.<sup>1</sup>

**7 percent saturated fat would be 16 g (or less) per day**, which means that if you consume 2,000 calories a day, you should actually try to consume no more than 16 grams of saturated fat a day. (To figure: multiply 2,000 by 0.07 to get 140 calories, and divide that number by 9 [the number of calories per gram of fat] to get 16 grams of saturated fat.)

**1 percent trans fat would be 2 g (or less) per day**, which means that if you consume 2,000 calories a day, you should consume no more than 2 grams of trans fat a day. (To figure: multiply 2,000 by 0.01 to get 20 calories, and divide that number by 9 [the number of calories per gram of fat] to get 2 grams of trans fat.)

The remainder of the guidelines are not written as percentages and, therefore, can be more easily understood. Cut dietary cholesterol to 200-300 milligrams (mg) or less per day, and cut sodium (salt) to 2,400 mg or less per day (1,500 mg or less if at high risk). Don't forget to increase your intake of fiber. You want to eat at least 25-30 g of dietary fiber each day.

Note:

- One egg yolk has about 200 mg of dietary cholesterol.
- One teaspoon of salt is about 2,300 mg of sodium.<sup>2</sup>
- One tablespoon ground psyllium seed contains 6 g dietary fiber; ½ cup lima beans contains 6.5 g dietary fiber; ½ cup brussel sprouts contains 4.5 g dietary fiber; 1 medium orange or grapefruit contains 2-3 g of dietary fiber; ¼ cup prunes contains 3 g dietary fiber; ½ cup cooked oatmeal contains 2 g dietary fiber.<sup>3</sup> For more suggestions on dietary fiber see [Food Sources of Soluble Fiber](#).

#### What Does a Gram Look Like?

A gram is a measure of weight, but how much is a gram? What does it look like? "It is always good to have something you know to compare to a weight, so you can better understand how much that weight is."<sup>4</sup> A dime weighs about 1 gram and so does an average-sized paper clip. A nickel weighs about 5 grams.<sup>5</sup> Picturing these objects can help us better understand how much a gram is. Other items that weigh about 1 gram include:

- a plastic pen cap
- a dollar bill
- a single Smartie candy.<sup>6</sup>

In a practical sense then, one gram of sugar is about 1 ½ teaspoons, while 455 grams is about 1 pound.<sup>7</sup>

Note: milligrams are much smaller than grams – 1,000 times smaller, in fact. In other words, there are 1,000 milligrams in 1 gram.<sup>8</sup>

To figure your numbers in the "Want to Know Your Numbers?" table on the next page, simply replace the 2,000 calories in these calculations with the number of calories you need each day. Then read food labels and add up your numbers to see if you consume a heart-healthy diet.

| Want to Know Your Numbers?                    |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Example: Healthy adult on 2,000 calorie diet: | Your Numbers:                 |
| 2,000 calories/day                            | _____ calories/day            |
| 67 g total fat/day                            | _____ total fat/day           |
| 16 g saturated fat/day                        | _____ saturated fat/day       |
| 2 g trans fat/day                             | _____ trans fat/day           |
| 2,400 mg sodium/day                           | _____ sodium/day              |
| 300 mg dietary cholesterol/day                | _____ dietary cholesterol/day |
| 25-30 mg dietary fiber/day                    | _____ dietary fiber/day       |

### Selecting the Right Number of Servings

Sometimes, rather than counting gram and milligram measurements, it is easier to count servings. A great resource for helping count the right number of servings in each food group you should eat (or those you should limit) is the Krames on-line site from Northern Inyo Hospital.<sup>9</sup> Here's how it works:

1. First, look at *Eating the Right Number of Servings* to understand each food group.
2. Next, read *Eating the Right Number of Calories* to find out the approximate number of calories you should eat daily based on your age and activity level. Be sure to discuss this information with your doctor or registered dietitian, especially if you have a health/medical condition, such as diabetes or heart disease.
3. Finally, choose the *MyPyramid Daily Food Recommendations and Servings Worksheet* (on the left-hand side bar of the screen) for your appropriate calorie needs (e.g., *MyPyramid Daily Food Recommendations and Servings Worksheet: 1,800 Calories* or *MyPyramid Daily Food Recommendations and Servings Worksheet: 2,600 Calories*).

Now you can start counting your servings. Be sure to note portion sizes and eat the right amounts. You might try measuring some of your portions when you start counting servings. After measuring portions for a while, you will be able to more easily see what a single serving looks like.

### Sources:

1. Mayo Clinic (2007). Dietary fats: Know which types to choose [on-line]. Retrieved September 26, 2007 <http://mayoclinic.com/health/fat/NU00262>.
2. American Heart Association (2007). Eat a heart-healthy diet [on-line]. Retrieved September 26, 2007. From <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1510>.
3. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (2007). Food sources of soluble fiber [on-line]. Retrieved October 10, 2007. From <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/chd/Tipsheets/solfiber.htm>.
4. Rice, S. (2007). Ms. Rice's workpage: How much is a gram? [on-line]. Retrieved November 16, 2007. From <http://susanrice07.wordpress.com/?s=gram>
5. WikiAnswers (2007). How much is one gram? [on-line]. Retrieved November 16, 2007. From [http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How\\_much\\_is\\_one\\_gram](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How_much_is_one_gram).
6. YahooAnswers (2007). How much is a gram? [on-line]. Retrieved November 16, 2007. From <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=1006052922695>.
7. YahooAnswers (2007). How much is one gram of sugar? [on-line]. Retrieved November 16, 2007. From [http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;\\_ylt=AodpsG47eyk5xOzCeUVsNsAjzKIX;\\_ylv=3?qid=20070109235830AAFNJGJ](http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;_ylt=AodpsG47eyk5xOzCeUVsNsAjzKIX;_ylv=3?qid=20070109235830AAFNJGJ).
8. Nemours Foundation (2003). Figuring out food labels [on-line]. Retrieved November 27, 2007. From [http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/stay\\_healthy/food/labels.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/labels.html).
9. Northern Inyo Hospital (2007). Welcome to Northern Inyo Hospital [on-line]. Retrieved November 26, 2007. From <http://www.nih.org/>.

Educational programs of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating