

Does the average American diet provide adequate nutrition?



"Nearly the entire U.S. population consumes a diet that is not on par with recommendations," is the conclusion of a report published online on August 11, 2010 in the *Journal of Nutrition*.

Susan M. Krebs Smith and her colleagues at the National Cancer Institute evaluated data from 16,338 individuals aged 2 and older who participated in the 2001-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). Quantities of foods reported in 24 hour dietary recall interviews were categorized into groups included in the USDA's food pyramid, which diagrams the recommended dietary intake of total fruits, whole fruits, total vegetables, dark green vegetables orange vegetables, legumes, starchy vegetables, other vegetables, milk, total grains, whole grains, meat and beans, and oils.

With the exception of total grains, and meat and beans, the majority of the sample surveyed failed to consume the minimum recommendations for each food group. Of 14 groups analyzed according to age and gender, two to three year olds had the least inadequate intake of total fruit, whole fruit, orange vegetables, legumes and milk. Almost all participants failed to consume enough dark green vegetables, orange vegetables, legumes and whole grains. Total vegetable and milk

recommendations were unmet by most people in over half of the groups. Empty calories, including solid fats, added sugars and alcoholic beverages were overconsumed by more than 90 percent of those aged 70 and younger. Even though the recommended limit for alcoholic beverages for men is twice that of women, more men than women exceeded their limit, particularly those aged 31 to 50. Women aged 19 to 30 consumed less than the recommended intake in 8 of the 14 groups.

"This analysis indicates that nearly the entire U.S. population consumes a diet with fewer vegetables and whole grains than recommended and that a large majority underconsume fruits, milk, and oils relative to recommendations," the authors write.

"The stark contrasts observed between the diets of Americans as well as the U.S. food supply and current dietary guidance underscore the need for individual- and environmental-level interventions to facilitate healthier dietary intake patterns. Without such interventions, the diets of most U.S. adults and children will continue to be markedly divergent from recommendations, a worrisome state in the context of the obesity epidemic and alarming rates of other diet-related chronic diseases."