



## The American Diet—a Prescription for Ill Health

- Two out of three adults and one out of three children and adolescents in the United States are either overweight or obese.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Since 1980, the percentage of American children aged 6 to 19 who are obese has tripled, while the percentage of adults who are obese has doubled.<sup>3,4</sup>
- More than 60 percent of U.S. adults have hypertension (high blood pressure) or pre-hypertension, caused in part by consuming too much sodium from packaged foods, too little potassium from fruits and vegetables, and being overweight.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, 90 percent of adults will develop high blood pressure.<sup>6</sup>
- Obesity is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and premature death.<sup>7</sup>
- The annual medical cost for obesity is about \$150 billion,<sup>8</sup> plus another \$73 billion in reduced productivity.<sup>9</sup>
- Fewer than one in 10 Americans over age 12 consume the recommended levels of total fruits and vegetables.<sup>10</sup>
- Consuming too much fructose from sugar or high-fructose corn syrup raises blood levels of uric acid, which can cause gout.<sup>11</sup>
- The average adult consumes about 3,700 milligrams of sodium per day—more than twice the 1,500 milligrams recommended for middle-aged or older adults, people with hypertension, or African Americans.<sup>12</sup> In addition to hypertension, too much sodium increases the risk of stroke, heart failure, osteoporosis, and kidney disease.<sup>13</sup>
- Excess sodium consumption causes about 50,000 to 100,000 premature deaths per year.<sup>14</sup>
- Added sugars provide about 14 percent of total calories for the average American,<sup>15</sup> 21 percent of calories for teens, and 25 percent or more of calories for over 36 million Americans.<sup>16</sup>
- Americans spend about 17 percent of their food budget on refined grains, but only 1.5 percent on whole grains, while the USDA recommends spending one-fourth as much on refined grains and seven times as much on whole grains. USDA recommends that Americans spend 14 times as much of their food budget on legumes and dark green and orange vegetables as they do.<sup>17</sup>
- About one-third of Americans' calories comes from foods prepared outside the home (restaurants, vending machines, schools, etc.). On average, those foods have more saturated fat and sodium and less dietary fiber than foods prepared at home.<sup>18</sup>
- People should limit red meat (beef, pork, lamb) to no more than 18 ounces per week and avoid processed meats (deli meats, bacon, sausage, hot dogs, etc.) to lower the risk of colorectal cancer.<sup>19</sup>
- Vegetarians, most of whom consume eggs and dairy products, have a 29 percent lower death rate from heart disease and an 18 percent lower risk of cancer than meat-eaters.<sup>20</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Ogden, C.L. et al. *JAMA*. 307, 483-490 (2012).  
<sup>2</sup>Flegal, K.M. et al. *JAMA*. 307, 491-497 (2012).  
<sup>3</sup>Ogden, C. & Carroll, M. [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/obesity\\_child\\_07\\_08/obesity\\_child\\_07\\_08.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/obesity_child_07_08/obesity_child_07_08.htm). Accessed March 29, 2013.  
<sup>4</sup>Fryar, C.D. et al. [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/obesity\\_adult\\_09\\_10/obesity\\_adult\\_09\\_10.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/obesity_adult_09_10/obesity_adult_09_10.htm). Accessed March 29, 2013.  
<sup>5</sup>Roger, V.L. et al. *Circulation*. 125, 188-197 (2012).  
<sup>6</sup>Vasan, R.S. et al. *JAMA*. 287, 1003-1010 (2002).  
<sup>7</sup>USDA and USDHHS. <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/dgas2010-policydocument.htm>. Accessed March 29, 2013.  
<sup>8</sup>Finkelstein, E.A. et al. *Health Affairs*. 28, 822-831 (2009).  
<sup>9</sup>Finkelstein, E.A. et al. *J Occup Environ Med*. 52, 971-976 (2010).  
<sup>10</sup>Kimmons, J. et al. *Medscape J Med*. 11, 26 (Epub) (2009).  
<sup>11</sup>Perez-Pozo, S.E. et al. *Int J Obes*. 34, 454-461 (2010).  
<sup>12</sup>Cogswell, M.E. et al. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 96, 647-657 (2012).  
<sup>13</sup>He, F.J. & MacGregor, G.A. *J Hum Hypertens*. 23, 363-384 (2009).  
<sup>14</sup>Coxson P.G., et al. *Hypertension*. 2013;61:564-570.  
<sup>15</sup>Welsh, J.A. et al. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 94, 726-734 (2011).  
<sup>16</sup>Marriott, B.P. et al. *Crit Rev Food Sci Nutr*. 50, 228-258 (2010).  
<sup>17</sup>Guthrie, J. et al. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2013-february/americans-food-choices-at-home-and-away.aspx#UWcFIeRd1A>. Accessed April 11, 2013.  
<sup>18</sup>*Ibid*.  
<sup>19</sup>WCRF and AICR. [http://www.wcrf.org/cancer\\_research/cup/colorectal\\_cancer.php](http://www.wcrf.org/cancer_research/cup/colorectal_cancer.php). Accessed April 18, 2013.  
<sup>20</sup>Huang T. et al. *Ann Nutr Metab*. 60, 233-240 (2012).