



# Are you getting enough?

*Nutrition, that is.  
How to make sense  
of new dietary guidelines*

*by Diana Johansen*

**It's** hard to make sense of dietary guidelines for people living with HIV. Years ago, the basic recommendation was to eat high calorie and high protein foods. All nutrition strategies were aimed at preventing weight loss. Times have changed. For some individuals, high calorie-high protein diets are still required, but more and more people have to cope with fat redistribution, being overweight, and the risk of developing heart disease. It can be quite confusing because sometimes competing nutrition priorities make it difficult to choose the appropriate diet.

## Recommended dietary intakes

Build a solid nutrition foundation by meeting the nutrition recommendations that govern the recommended dietary intakes for healthy populations. Up to a few years ago, the recommended dietary allowance (RDA) was the benchmark to assess nutritional adequacy. The RDA for nutrients was set to meet the nutritional needs of 97% of the healthy population.

More recently, recommendations were updated with the development of dietary reference intakes (DRI), new recommen-

dations that try to address issues such as preventing chronic disease and over-nutrition. The expert panels that developed these guidelines also defined safe upper tolerable limits, so individuals can avoid harm from consuming too much of any single nutrient. DRIs are designed to meet the needs of healthy people who have no disease or condition that might affect their nutritional requirements.

Although HIV/AIDS clearly impacts nutritional needs, DRI recommendations meet the minimum intakes required for health and should be the starting point in considering nutrition plans for HIV-infected individuals. See Table 1 for examples of the recommended intake (AI) and the upper safe limit (UL).

## Calories

In Table 2, the new recommendations for calorie intake are tied to weight, height, and activity level. Calories should come from a variety of foods containing carbohydrates, fats, and protein. The new guidelines call for getting 45–65% of calories as carbohydrates (such as grains, fruits, and vegetables), 20–35% from fats (added and hidden fats), and 10–35% from protein (such as meats,

dairy, and beans). The wide ranges allow individuals to arrange their diets to meet their specific health needs. They also promote greater flexibility in choosing foods because the bottom line is the amount of calories consumed, not necessarily the source. People with HIV generally need the higher range for protein and somewhere in the middle range for fat and carbohydrates.

## Carbohydrates

The new guidelines recommend a minimum of 130 grams of carbohydrates daily to produce enough glucose for the brain to function well. The guidelines also suggest that added sugar should make up less than 25% of calories consumed. Added sugars come from candy, pop, sweetened cereals, fruit drinks, other sweets, and sugar added to foods. This recommendation was derived from evidence that people who eat a lot of sugar tend to have lower intakes of essential nutrients.

## Fats

The panel did not make a clear recommendation for total fat intake because fat is a major source of calories and people have different needs. Dietary fat is also required to help fat-

Table 1: Vitamin and mineral requirements

	Calcium (mg)		Vitamin D (µg)		Magnesium (mg)		(mg)		Vitamin A (mg)		Selenium (µg)		Zinc (mg)		Vitamin C (mg)		Folate (mg)		Vitamin E (mg)	
	AI	UL	AI	UL	AI	UL	AI	UL	AI	UL	AI	UL	AI	UL	AI	UL	AI	UL	AI	UL
Male	1000	2500	5	25	420	420	1.3	100	3000	10000	55	400	11	40	90	2000	400	1000	15	1000
Female	1000	2500	5	25	350	420	1.3	100	2330	10000	55	400	8	40	75	2000	400	1000	15	1000

soluble nutrients get absorbed into the body. Therefore, the panel recommended that people eat as little as possible of the “bad” fats, such as saturated fats from meat and dairy and trans fatty acids (hydrogenated oils), because these fats are known to increase the risk of heart disease by raising blood cholesterol levels.

The so-called “good” fats, mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acids, provide the essential fats alpha-linolenic acid and linoleic acid. These fats are essential because the body cannot make them. These “good” fats can be found in foods such as vegetable oils, fish, nuts, and flax. The recommended intakes for alpha-linolenic acid is 1.6 grams for men and 1.1 grams for women, and for linoleic acid, 17 grams for men and 12 grams for women. Most people get at least 50 grams of fat a day. If most of it comes from “good” fats, it is easy to meet these requirements.

### Protein

Protein recommendations did not significantly change in this review. The old recommendations were that healthy people needed 0.86 grams per kilogram of body weight per day. The new DRI sets the daily requirement for a healthy adult at 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight. A person weighing 70kg, for example, would require 56 grams of protein per day. Individuals with HIV are generally recommended to get at least 1.0 gram per kilogram and even more in some situations.

### Fibre

For the first time, recommendations were made for a target fibre intake. The guideline is based on studies that show increased risk of heart disease when a person’s diet is low in fibre. Evidence suggests that fibre may also protect the colon from cancer and help with weight control. For adults up to 50 years of age, the recommended fibre consumption is 38 grams for men and 25 grams for women. For people over 50 years old, the recommendation is 30 grams for men and 21 grams for women. Foods high in dietary fibre include whole grains, bran cereals, vegetables, and fruits. Anyone

Table 2: Calorie requirements

	Sedentary Calories required	Active Calories required
<b>5 feet, 1 inch (98–132lb)</b>		
men	1919-2167	2104-2290
women	1688-1834	2104-2290
<b>5 feet, 5 inches (up to 150lb)</b>		
men	2068-2349	2490-2842
women	1816-1982	2267-2477
<b>5 feet, 9 inches (125–169lb)</b>		
men	2222-2538	2638-3078
women	1948-2134	2434-2670
<b>6 feet, 1 inch (139–188lb)</b>		
men	2382-2736	2883-3325
women	2083-2290	2605-2869

with chronic diarrhea should exercise caution when increasing fibre intake.

### Exercise

The new guidelines have also taken a strong stance on physical activity. The old guidelines merely said people should be more active. However, many health problems are influenced by activity levels as well as dietary factors. The new guidelines recommend a total of 60 minutes per day of activity. The time of 60 minutes was derived from studies of the activity levels of people who maintained their weight. The time spent on activities is added up throughout the day including low intensity activities of daily living, such as walking and housework, as well as more vigorous exercise such as swimming or cycling.

### The bottom line

Try to have balance in your diet. Enjoy eating a variety of foods that provide the nutrients you need for health. Get enough calories to maintain a healthy weight. Restrict as few foods as possible. Be as active as you can. A dietitian can fine-tune your diet to help you meet your unique needs. ⊕



Diana Johansen, RD, is the dietitian at Oak Tree Clinic in Vancouver. She specializes in HIV.