

Writing in Washington Post (January 2016) [Tamar Haspel](#) and Marion Nestle took a swipe at the USA's government guidelines. We can skip all that; but in this extract they also said:

Here's how to eat better, in easy steps

WE'RE going rogue and issuing our own Dietary Guidelines, untainted by industry lobbying, unrestricted by partisan politics.

Here, in six easy steps, is our advice for the new year: what we think dietary guidelines ought to say.

1. Eat more plants. You heard it from your grandmother. Now you hear it from us: Eat your vegetables. Add fruits, beans and whole grains, and the wide-ranging plant category should make up most of your diet. Variety is the key. Plants offer us such an astonishing range of roots, stems, leaves, flowers, buds and seeds that there is bound to be something even the most jaded vegetable sceptic can love.

2. Don't eat more calories than you need. Although on any given day it's hard to tell whether you're doing that, over the long term, your scale is a sure-fire indicator. If the pounds are going up, eat less.

Let's pause here for the good news. If you follow our first two guidelines, you can stop worrying. Everything else is fine-tuning, and you have plenty of leeway.

3. Eat less junk. "And what's junk?" we hear you asking. We have faith that you know exactly what junk is.

It's foods with lots of calories, plenty of sugar and salt and not nearly enough nutritional value.

It's soda and sugary drinks. It's highly processed, packaged foods designed to be irresistible. It's fast food. You know it when you see it. When you do, don't eat too much of it.

4. Eat a variety of foods you enjoy. There is research on the health implications of just about any food you can think of. Some — such as fish — may be good for you. You should eat others — such as meat and refined grains — in smaller amounts.

The evidence for most foods is so inconsistent that you should never force yourself to eat them if you don't want to, or deny yourself if you do. If you love junk foods, you get to eat them, too (in moderation, of course). You have bought yourself that wiggle room by making sure the bulk of your diet is plants and by not eating more than you need.

This is an appropriate place to talk about a phrase that has been thrown around a lot in the Dietary Guidelines brouhaha: "science-based."

As a journalist (Tamar) and a scientist (Marion), we're very much in favour of science. But the food industry's frequent calls for 'science-based' guidelines really mean, "We don't like what you said."

Arriving at truths about human nutrition isn't easy. We can't keep research subjects captive and feed them controlled diets for the decades it takes many health problems to play out. Nor can we feed them something until it kills them. We have to rely on animal research, short-term trials and population data, all of which have serious limitations and require interpretation — and intelligent people can come to quite different opinions about what those studies mean.

Which is why "eat some if you like it" isn't a wishy-washy cop-out. It acknowledges science's limitations.

We do know that plants are good, and we do know that junk foods aren't, but in between is an awful lot of uncertainty.

So, eat more plants, eat less junk, and eat that in-between stuff moderately. That is exactly the advice science demands.

5. Find the joy in food. Eat mindfully and convivially. One of life's great gifts is the need to eat, so don't squander it with mindless, joyless consumption. Try to find pleasure in every meal, and share it with friends, relatives, even strangers.

6. Learn to cook. The better you cook, the better you eat. There are days when cooking feels like a chore, but there are also days when you find profound satisfaction in feeding wholesome homemade food to people you love. And foods you make at home are worlds apart from foods that manufacturers make in factories. No home kitchen ever turned out a Lunchable.

If you go out in the world armed only with these guidelines, you'll do great. Sure, there's much more to know, if you want to know it. We've forged careers writing about food and nutrition, and either one of us could talk micronutrients until your eyes glaze over. But these few basics are all you need to make good food decisions. Choose foods you like — heavy on the plants, light on the junk — cook them and enjoy them.

It really is that simple.

Haspel is the James Beard award-winning writer of *Unearthed*, a Washington Post column devoted to finding out what's actually true about food.

Nestle is professor of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University and is the author, most recently, of *'Soda Politics: Taking on Big Soda (and Winning).'*

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