



New and Improved

Canada's new Food Guide has a revitalized outlook

At 65 *Canada's Food Guide* is still going strong. Mind you it has had a few little tucks and tweaks along the way. The latest version, *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*, is based on years of rethinking, input and consultations from over 7,000 contributors.

The first version, *Canada's Official Food Rules*, was introduced in 1942, and was the result of the government's efforts to prevent nutritional deficiencies due to wartime food rationing. In contrast, today's version is largely focused on rationing what we eat based on a recommended number and size of servings. It seems that while some of us have been eating well, we're also eating well too much.

In 1961 *Canada's Official Food Rules* were reinvented as *Canada's Food Guide*. This swanky '60s guide lasted for 16 years until it was revised in 1977, and then again in 1982. Finally, in 1992 the guide became *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. The latest version, released last month, will likely be around for some time, given the complexity of today's nutritional and related health sciences upon which it is founded, and the amount of effort required to change it.

Perhaps one of the most significant changes in the new guide relates to the recommended number of food servings per day. The guide refers to three age groups containing six sub groups: children aged two to three, four to eight, and nine to 13; teens aged 14 to 18; and adults 19 to 50 and 51 plus. Serving recommendations are also separated by gender for teens and adults. Physical activity, which was part of the previous guide, now receives even more emphasis. Social considerations such as eating with friends and family are also covered, with the goal of encouraging better food choices and providing dietary role models for family members. In addition, the "total diet approach" of providing all nutrient needs is replaced by the realization that certain segments of the population may still benefit from supplementation, and it's now recommended that adults over 50 take a 400 IU vitamin D supplement daily. The concept of supplements isn't new (in the 1944 guide this meant a daily dose of fish liver oil), and as far back as 1949 the guide recommended that all growing persons, and expectant and nursing mothers,

be given 400 IU Vitamin D supplementation.

The guide also now recommends a multivitamin with folic acid for all women of childbearing age, and a multivitamin with iron for pregnant women. These recommendations are based on the recognition that even though many of today's staples (such as flour, dairy products and margarine) must be fortified with vitamins, supplementation may still be necessary for select segments of the population. As fortification rules have changed so too have dietary guidelines (for instance, in 1944 the guide recommended the use of iodized salt, something we now take for granted), and the next version of the guide will likely need to reflect Canada's revised food fortification regulations.

Another emphasis in the new food guide is the importance of limiting trans fats, saturated fat, salt and added sugar. Due to the connection between these fats and salt and the growing prevalence of cardiovascular disease, stroke and type two diabetes, these ingredients are now targeted as "unwanted." And even in the fruit and vegetable category, produce is emphasized over sweeter fruit and vegetable juices.

Finally, the 2007 guide introduces the nutrition facts table (NFT) as a means of comparing nutrition information. The guide oddly illustrates a NFT that is all zeros, including the serving size. Existentialists be warned! Does a food like this really exist? A keen eye will also notice that the format deviates from that of a true food label. For example, the per cent daily value appears to be for saturated fat only, when it should be for both saturated and trans fat. The point is that the NFT represents the times we live in – the information age. Canadians no longer have an excuse for not making better food choices. Canadian grocery stores now offer a great variety of foods. With reforms to food regulations that inspire rather than inhibit the development of nutritious foods, there's no reason why food choices can't be even better in the future.

Gary Gnirss is a partner and president of Legal Suites Inc., a Mansfield, Ont.-based firm specializing in regulatory software and services. E-mail: president@legalsuites.com