

Leyla Weighs In: Dietary Guidelines for Americans



In an effort first started by the National Academies of Sciences in 2017 to increase transparency and manage bias, The Nutrition Coalition along with six other agencies and universities recently undertook a study to measure incidence of conflicts of interest within the advisory committee for the 2020-2025 U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA).

In December 2020, the 9th version of the DGA was released. Every five years, a new edition of the DGA is formed by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and the Health and Human Services (HHS) in their exclusive selection of a Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC). The purpose of this committee is to review the current scientific evidence to inform any needed revisions to the DGA, forming its' next edition.

Of interest is how advisory committee members are selected. According to researchers, 95% of committee members had conflicts of interest with food and pharmaceutical industries, particularly, Abbott, Kellogg, Kraft, Mead Johnson, General Mills, Dannon and International Life Sciences. That's 19 of the 20 members! Moreover, research funding and membership of an advisory board jointly accounted for

more than 60% of the total number of conflicts of interest documented.

Do you think this advisory board would or should be deemed trustworthy to give Americans sound scientific dietary advice? Not by me. Profit-driven interests only serve to undermine the public's health, not help it. Dietary guidelines that can be considered trustworthy must be borne of transparency, objectivity and be based on valid and reliable scientific research. Food and pharmaceutical companies shouldn't be telling us what to eat.

To be clear, I don't support the DGA, but not only because of undue influence by Big Agriculture and Big Pharma—which is clearly unethical—but also because giving blanket dietary advice to the American public as a whole is wrong, in my opinion. Over 65 percent of Americans have some metabolic abnormalities secondary to overweight and obesity. And if the so-called guidelines are meant to be followed by healthy Americans, who exactly is healthy—maybe 30 percent of the public? In fact, unhealthy Americans who choose to follow this advice may find themselves to be worse off metabolically. That's why it's imperative that each individual be assessed and advised based on their unique biochemistry and conditions.

To your health!