

## Comparing women's diets to the updated Australian dietary guidelines

**What you need to know:** To follow the new Australian Dietary Guidelines most Australian women would require a substantial change in their current eating habits. To make the dietary guidelines more attainable, dietary change messages need to be achievable. For instance, reaching the recommended daily vegetable intake could be as easy as adding an extra serving of vegetables to each meal; this is a goal many women could achieve.

### **What this research is about**

The Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADG) 2013 were recently updated to reflect the latest scientific evidence. The new guidelines encourage Australians to eat a nutritious diet that includes a variety of foods from the five main food groups, and to limit the intake of alcohol and foods containing saturated fats, added salt and added sugar. Compared with previous guidelines there have been a number of important changes, including providing separate guidelines for those aged 19-50 and 51-70 years. For example, the recommended dairy intake for women aged 51-70 has increased from two to four servings per day.

### **What did the researchers do**

Researchers compared the diets reported by three groups of study participants – young women who were not pregnant (aged 31-36 years), young women who were pregnant, and mid-age women (aged 50-55 years) – in relation to the new dietary guidelines.

### **What did the research find**

Here are some of the key findings:

- Less than 2% of women from all groups attained the daily recommended intake of five serves of vegetables.
- Less than 10% of young (pregnant or not pregnant) women reached the recommended intake of grains.
- Fewer than one in four women met the guidelines for daily serves of dairy products, with only 1% of mid-age women reaching the recommended four daily serves of dairy.
- Only 10% of pregnant women reached the recommended 3.5 serves of meat and meat substitutes per day.
- In terms of Body Mass Index (BMI), 54% of the mid-age women (aged 50-55) were overweight or obese, compared with 46% of young women (aged 31-36) and 43% of pregnant women (based on pre-pregnancy weight).
- Almost half of the young women (49%), and more than half of pregnant women (64%) and mid-age women (55%) were sedentary or had low physical activity levels.

### **How can you use this research?**

For most women to follow ADG recommendations would require substantially increased consumption of most food groups. While a complete transformation in diet is unrealistic, a gradual transition is achievable; for instance, meeting the dietary guidelines for vegetable intake could be achieved by incorporating one extra serving at each meal. However, given the high rate of obesity and overweight among Australian women, recommendations for increases in the number of daily servings of dairy and meat would need careful dissemination to encourage a corresponding decline in foods high in saturated fats and added sugar, to avoid excessive energy intake and weight gain.

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