

Nationwide Study Reveals What America Really Eats

CHICAGO, Ill. — The Great Pyramids of Egypt aren't the only pyramids in need of a little maintenance. New data show that most Americans don't follow the government's Food Guide Pyramid, but eat a diet that resembles a Pyramid ready to topple—structurally unsound and top-heavy from too few fruits and vegetables and too many fats, oils and sweets.

The exception is the Meat Group, which is the only one eaten in recommended amounts. "Considering that the meat industry is perceived as being the nutritional problem, this result gives us a positive consumer message," says National Live Stock and Meat Board Chairman Jim Hauge, a producer from Leith, North Dakota. "And, this study tells me that the checkoff investments to educate consumers and thought leaders about trimming excess fat, choosing lean cuts and eating appropriate servings of meat have worked."

The Meat Board Eating in America Today 11 (EAT II) dietary intake and attitude survey,

funded by beef, pork and lamb check offs, found that all segments of the population underconsume foods in the Vegetable, Fruit, Bread and Milk Groups, and overconsume Fats, Oils and Sweets.

Sorting food fact from fiction. The study also shows that perception isn't reality when it comes to eating. On average, most Americans are not eating as well as they think they are.

Adult women and men think that their diets closely reflect the USDA/Health and Human Services Food Guide Pyramid recommendations. Women think they eat more servings from the Vegetable, Fruit, Milk and Meat Groups than they actually do. Men overestimate their consumption of the Fruit, Milk and Meat Groups. Men and women underestimate how much they eat from the Fats, Oils and Sweets category and the Bread Group.

"There is a big difference between what we think we eat and what we actually eat. EAT II shows that most people are confused about the true meaning of a

healthy diet and about what it takes to turn nutrition guidelines into reality," said Carol Smeja, Ph.D., vice president of the Nutritional Marketing division for MRCA Information Services, Inc., who conducted the study for the Meat Board. "For example, people recognize that 30 percent of calories from fat is the benchmark, they just don't know how to apply it." EAT II uniquely matches attitudes and behavior to gain a complete picture of the American consumer.

Good news, bad news. Half of American consumers recognize 30 percent as the recommended percentage for calories from fat. However, most are unclear if this applies to a diet or a food, according to EAT II (this rule is meant to apply to the total diet). Only 9 percent properly knew that this statement was false: "No more than 30 percent of calories in a food should come from fat." These dietary misunderstandings have a negative impact on the meat industry

The EAT II report found that, on average, Americans consume about 67 grams of fat per day, which is equal to 37 percent of their total daily calories. The Meat Group (meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs and nuts) contributes 26 grams of fat—only 39 percent of total fat intake. Other fat sources include the Bread Group with 13 grams, the Milk Group with 11 grams, and Fats, Oils and Sweets with 11 grams, according to the EAT II report. The Vegetable Group contributes about 6 grams of fat, primarily added during preparation.

Meat marketing affected. "The meat industry is in a great marketing position," said Eric Hentges, Ph.D., Meat Board director of nutrition research. EAT II has great implications for national nutrition education strategies. The current strategy of food elimination and risk avoidance is not working. We think a better strategy is optimizing our diets by balancing the Pyramid. We see this as a

major win-win for all concerns, especially the meat industry."

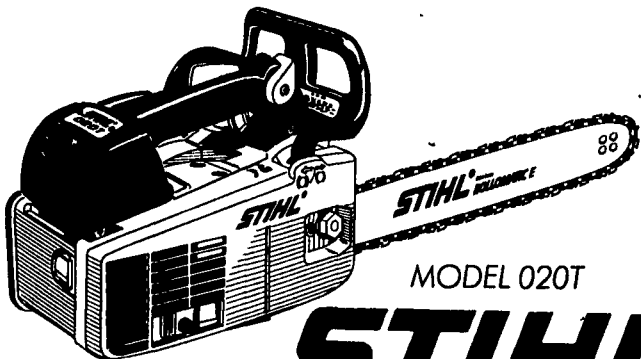
Hentges contends that balancing the American diet will throw off the "undeserved yoke of elimination" that now plagues the meat industry.

The Meat Board is taking EAT II aggressively into the healthcare professional's realm through strategically selected briefings and presentations. In the short term, an extensive national consumer media campaign has been launched, and includes a New York City event for America's premier health, science and nutrition reporters. The study has already earned positive coverage in the Chicago Tribune and from other newspapers that receive its wire service. Television stations have also aired positive stories.

The National Live Stock and Meat Board is the nation's beef, pork, lamb and veal coalition with the mission to increase consumer demand.

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