

BRAZIL

NEW DIETARY GUIDELINES: COOK AND EAT WHOLE FOODS, BE WARY OF ADS

What if your national dietary guidelines advised you to cook and enjoy fresh, whole foods, and serve them with friends and family while thinking critically about food advertising? Hard to imagine, isn't it? Well, that's exactly what Brazil's Ministry of Health is recommending with the "food based" dietary guidelines it released in 2014. Unlike the U.S. dietary guidelines (or "MyPlate"), which focus on reducing solid fats and added sugars, and pinpoint a long list of nutrients to consume or reduce, Brazil's guidelines keep it simple by encouraging people to eat more fresh, unprocessed foods. It's worth listing the guidelines' recommendations in full:

- Prepare meals from staple and fresh foods.
- Use oils, fats, sugar, and salt in moderation.
- Limit consumption of ready-to-consume food and drink products.
- Eat regular meals, paying attention, and in appropriate environments.
- Eat in company whenever possible.
- Buy food at places that offer varieties of fresh foods. Avoid those that mainly sell products ready for consumption.
- Develop, practice, share, and enjoy your skills in food preparation and cooking.
- Plan your time to give meals and eating proper time and space.
- When you eat out, choose restaurants that serve freshly made dishes and meals. Avoid fast-food chains.
- Be critical of the commercial advertisement of food products.¹⁷⁹

"I think it's terrific that [Brazil's guidelines] promote real foods, cooking, and family meals, rather than worrying about the nutritional quality of processed foods or dealing with single nutrients," says Marion Nestle, a prominent author and professor in the department of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University.

As in many developed and developing countries, Brazil has seen recent spikes in the numbers of overweight and obese people. In 2011, nearly half of Brazilians were overweight, and about 16 percent were obese.¹⁸⁰ Carlos Monteiro of the University of São Paulo attributes this widespread increase in BMI to the transition from unprocessed or minimally processed foods such as rice, fruits, and vegetables to "ultra processed foods."¹⁸¹

Like the U.S., Brazil is a major agricultural producer. Brazil-based JBS is the world's largest processor of animal protein, and the nation tops the world in exports of beef and chicken.¹⁸² It's also a leading player in the global soybean boom, and miles and miles of Brazil's rainforest and savannah have been cleared of trees and other vegetation in recent decades to grow livestock feed on a massive scale.¹⁸³ Alongside their thriving agricultural export trade, Brazilians have begun eating more meat, dairy products, and eggs. And as the Brazilian middle class has grown, transnational food companies have expanded their operations and marketing in Brazil, spreading U.S.-style fast-food culture further.¹⁸⁴

But the new diet guidelines are pointing in the opposite direction: they advocate slower food. By focusing on the importance of taking the time to prepare meals and eat in the company of others, the new Brazilian dietary guidelines prioritize food culture and the environment in which meals are consumed. This is extremely important: Research by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has shown a link between eating outside the home and increased obesity.¹⁸⁵

The tenth and final Brazilian dietary recommendation, "Be critical of the commercial advertisement of food products," is particularly unusual in the world of dietary guidelines. This indicates that at least some policymakers within the Brazilian government are aware of the harmful effects of advertising and are actively trying to combat food industry manipulation through policy statements (and actions).

There's a history here. In 2013, São Paulo, Brazil's largest city, fined McDonald's U.S. \$1.6 million for using toys and other inducements to appeal to

children.¹⁸⁶ São Paulo also was the first city in Brazil to adopt Meatless Mondays (“Segunda Sem Carne” in Portuguese), which has now expanded to 15 cities across the country. Brazil’s government has also mandated healthier school food.¹⁸⁷

It’s still early to assess the impacts of Brazil’s dietary guidelines, and ready access to a range of healthy foods remains a challenge in the country,



Soybeans being harvested in Brazil's Cerrado region

as it does in most places. But the guidelines do provide an important model and a vision that’s absent from most countries’ efforts so far. Perhaps in future policy-makers in other regions both North and South will look to Brazil’s pioneering food guidelines and put more value on a critical-thinking, home-cooking, socially vibrant culture of real food than on the interests of “Big Food.” ♦

<p>Discussion Paper</p> <p> Brighter Green</p> <p>CHRONIC DISEASE, CHANGING DIETS AND SUSTAINABILITY</p> <p>The Globalization of Western-style Eating and Its Implications</p> 	<p>This is an excerpt from a Brighter Green discussion paper, which can be cited as: Bankman, Judy. “Chronic Disease, Changing Diets and Sustainability: The Globalization of Western-style Eating and Its Implications.” Brighter Green, 2017.</p> <p>The full paper can be accessed at http://brightergreen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/brighter_green_public_health_paper.pdf.</p>
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