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Mushrooms blend perfectly into new dietary guidelines

January 5, 2021

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture 2020-25 Dietary Guidelines for Americans aim to “Make Every Bite Count.” Mushrooms, classified as a vegetable in the DGA, are uniquely positioned to reach this goal as they are a nutrient-dense food that is low in calories and sodium, have no fat and provide vitamins, minerals and other health-promoting components.

The 2020-25 DGA provides four overarching Guidelines that encourage healthy eating patterns at each stage of life and recognize that individuals will need to make shifts in their food choices to achieve a healthy pattern. The four tenets include:

1. Follow a healthy dietary pattern at every life stage.
2. Customize and enjoy nutrient-dense food and beverage choices to reflect personal preferences, cultural traditions and budgetary considerations.
3. Focus on meeting food group needs with nutrient-dense foods and beverages and stay within calorie limits.
4. Limit foods and beverages higher in added sugar, saturated fat, and sodium, and limit alcoholic beverages.

Food and nutrition play a crucial role in health promotion and chronic disease prevention. Every five years since 1980, HHS and USDA publish the DGA, the U.S. go-to source for nutrition guidance. The latest edition of the DGA reflects the current body of nutrition science, helps health professionals and policymakers guide Americans to make healthy food and beverage choices, and serves as the science-based foundation for vital nutrition policies and programs across the United States.

Throughout the multi-year process to develop the DGA, the Mushroom Council and mushroom growers have submitted written comments, given oral testimony and shared information with the staff at the HHS and USDA.

New research from the Mushroom Council supports the DGA in increasing vegetable consumption by adding more mushrooms to the diet. Victor L. Fulgoni III and Sanjiv Agarwal examined the addition of mushrooms to USDA Food Patterns, which resulted in the increase of several micronutrients including shortfall nutrients, while having a minimal to zero impact on overall calories, sodium or saturated fat.

The study looked at the nutritional effect of substituting a serving of various foods recommended to be moderated in the diet by the previous U.S. Dietary Guidelines or Dietary Guidelines 2015-20 with an 84-gram serving of mushrooms (five medium white button mushrooms) on nutrient profiles in USDA's Healthy U.S.-Style, Mediterranean and Vegetarian Eating Patterns. This is a similar approach that the USDA used for determining its Guidelines.

Simply adding five medium mushrooms, or one 84-gram serving, to USDA Food Patterns increased several shortfall nutrients including potassium (8 percent daily value) and fiber (3 percent daily value) as well as other B vitamins and minerals and had minimal to no impact on overall calories, sodium or saturated fat. This discovery falls in line with USDA's “Make Every Bite Count” campaign to support the 2020-25 DGA.

NUTRIENT DENSITY

Long celebrated as a superfood source of powerful nutrients, fresh mushrooms are a healthy addition to the plate. Mushrooms provide many of the same nutritional benefits as vegetables, as well as attributes commonly found in meat, beans and grains. A single serving of white button mushrooms (90 grams) has 20 calories and zero grams fat, and is an excellent source of B vitamins, including riboflavin, pantothenic acid and niacin.

THE BLEND

Blending mushrooms with meat has been a top trend for the past few years and it doesn't look to be slowing down. The Blend, the practice of blending finely chopped fresh mushrooms with ground meat, is a great way to add more nutrient-dense vegetables to the plate while also adding flavor. One of the reasons for its popularity is that it doesn't sacrifice flavor for nutrition, in fact, the mushrooms add more than just nutrients but also umami.

A 2014 study from the Culinary Institute of America and University of California-Davis, explored the flavor-enhancing properties of mushrooms and found that blending finely chopped mushrooms with ground meat enhances flavor and nutrition. As the study shows, a traditional ground meat recipe prepared with 50 percent mushrooms and 50 percent meat (or even 80 percent mushrooms and 20 percent meat) can:

- Reduce calorie, fat and sodium intake, while adding nutrients like vitamin D, potassium (6 percent daily value) and B vitamins.
- Enhance the overall flavor, because of double the impact of umami.
- Maintain flavor while reducing sodium intake by 25 percent.

IMMUNE SUPPORT

Mushrooms sport two important nutrients important for maintaining a healthy immune system. The first is vitamin D. Mushrooms are the only source of vitamin D in the produce aisle. Just five UV-light exposed mushrooms (90 grams) contain more than a full day's recommended allowance (118 percent) of vitamin D. The second is selenium. This mineral may not get as much hype as other antioxidants, but that doesn't mean it's not essential. In fact, selenium plays a role in preventing cell damage, which is important for supporting a healthy immune system.

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