New Dietary Guidelines for Americans emphasize iodine for a healthy pregnancy

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has released its “2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.” Since the first edition was published in 1980, the Dietary Guidelines have provided science-based advice on what to eat and drink to promote health, reduce risk of chronic disease, and meet nutrient needs.

The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines 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 and beverage choices to achieve a healthy pattern. The Guidelines are supported by Key Recommendations that provide further guidance on healthy eating across the lifespan.

For the first time in the Dietary Guidelines, the recommendations specifically highlight the need for adequate iodine for pregnancy and lactation. On page 116, they state that iodine needs increase substantially during pregnancy and lactation. Adequate iodine intake during pregnancy is important for neurocognitive development of the fetus. Although women of reproductive age generally have adequate iodine intake in the U.S., some women, particularly those who do not regularly consume dairy products, eggs, seafood, or use iodized table salt, may not consume enough iodine to meet increased needs during pregnancy and lactation.

Women who are pregnant or lactating should not be encouraged to start using table salt if they do not do so already. However, they should ensure that any table salt used in cooking or added to food at the table is iodized. Additionally, women who are pregnant or lactating may need a supplement containing iodine in order to achieve adequate intake. Many prenatal supplements do not contain iodine. Thus, it is important to read the label.