

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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RADIO ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO THE NATION

The Oval Office

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Memorial Day weekend is a special time to honor those who have fought for our freedom, but also to gather with our family and friends at picnics and backyard barbecues, where we take pride in serving up plenty of good food. We should also take pains that the food we serve is good for us. Today I want to talk about new steps we're taking to empower Americans with the latest and best information on food and nutrition.

For 20 years now, the federal government has been setting guidelines for good nutrition, based on the best scientific evidence. And for over six years, the government has required nutrition labeling

on most foods. With better information, Americans are making better choices. We're eating less fat as a percentage of our diet; more fruits, vegetables and whole grains; and average blood cholesterol levels are going down.

Yet despite this progress, the vast majority of Americans still don't have healthy diets. And some changes in our lifestyles are making matters worse. We're eating more fast food because of our hectic schedules, and we're less physically active because of our growing reliance on modern conveniences, from cars to computers to remote controls. As a result, more and more Americans are overweight or obese, including one in ten children. This is an alarming trend, because obesity and bad eating habits contribute to four of the leading causes of death: heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes.

To address these challenges, experts from around our nation will meet next week in Washington for a summit on nutrition, sponsored by the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services. It will be the first national nutrition summit in 31 years. To kick off the summit, today I am releasing the federal government's new Dietary Guidelines 2000. They're updated every five years. These guidelines serve as the gold standard of nutritional information. They determine, among other things, the nutritional content of the lunches served to 26 million of our children every day in school.

These new guidelines strengthen the message that doctors and scientists have been telling us for some time now: we should choose more whole-grain foods and a variety of fruits and vegetables every day; and we should moderate the saturated fat, cholesterol, sugar, salt and alcohol in our diets.

There are two new guidelines this year as well. One emphasizes the importance of handling and storing food safely. The other makes clear the enormous benefits of building physical activity into our daily lives. Just a brisk 30-minute walk five times a week, for instance, can cut the chance of developing or dying from heart disease in half.

I am also pleased to announce today that this summer the federal government will propose that packaged meat and poultry sold in stores must come with nutrition labels. This is just plain common sense. Shoppers value the fact that when they pick up a box of cereal or a frozen meal, they can check the nutrition labels and see how many calories or grams of saturated fat these foods contain. That's the same kind of information that ought to be put on every package of ground beef. Currently, fewer than 60 percent of retailers do so, because nutrition labeling for meat is voluntary. It's time we made it mandatory.

Providing citizens with accurate information that affects

their lives is one of government's most vital responsibilities. But citizens have a responsibility to use that information wisely as well, especially when it comes to the food they provide their children, and the habits they encourage in them. So this weekend, have a good time. Let's all eat well, and eat right. Let's enjoy the outdoors and get some physical activity -- and be thankful for the bounteous times in which we live, and the country that makes us so proud.

Thanks for listening.

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