



# Fact Sheet

## Most Frequently Asked Questions about RDAs and DRIs

### What are the RDAs?

In 1941, the first Food and Nutrition Board established dietary standards for evaluating the nutritional intakes of large populations. This board developed the first Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs). The RDA for a nutrient is based on the amount needed to prevent a deficiency. Every ten years, the RDAs are revised as better scientific knowledge becomes available. The main RDAs include recommendations for energy (calories), protein, and many vitamins and minerals.

### What are the most common misconceptions about the RDAs?

First, the "R" in RDA stands for "recommended," not "required." Because the RDAs are developed for groups rather than individuals, the RDAs should be used primarily to plan and evaluate the diets of groups of people. Second, the "D" in RDA stands for "dietary," not "daily." We don't need to eat the RDA for each nutrient every day because our bodies store nutrients for later use. Third, the RDAs are not for everyone. Separate recommendations are made for different sets of people: men, women, pregnant women, and children. The RDAs do not apply to infants. The RDAs are also divided into age categories. Finally, the RDAs are for healthy persons only. Medical problems alter nutrient needs.

### What are the DRIs?

The Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) are values that are quantitative estimates of nutrient intakes to be used for planning and assessing diets for healthy people. The DRIs include both recommended intakes and tolerable upper intake levels. The DRIs are determined by the Institute of Medicine, a private, non-profit organization that provides health policy advice under government funding to the National Academy of Sciences.

### What are the DRIs replacing the RDAs?

Over the next few years, the DRIs will replace the RDAs. The DRIs represent a shift in emphasis from

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preventing deficiency to decreasing the risk of chronic disease through nutrition. The DRIs include levels that may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, certain cancers, and other diseases that are diet-related.

### How are the DRIs determined?

The DRIs are based on the scientific evaluation of four categories:

- Estimated Average Requirement (EAR) – a nutrient intake value that is estimated to meet the needs of 50% of a population. The EAR for a nutrient is used primarily as a basis for establishing a RDA and for evaluating the diet of a population.
- Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) – the average dietary intake level of a nutrient that prevents a deficiency in 98% of a population.
- Adequate Intake (AI) – a value set as a goal for individual intake for nutrients that do not have a RDA.
- Tolerable Upper Intake Level (UL) – the highest level of a nutrient that is likely to pose no risk of adverse health effects to 98% of a population.

### Should I try to consume the UL of a nutrient to get the most benefit?

No. The term "tolerable upper limit" was chosen to avoid implying that a possible beneficial effect of consuming more of a nutrient could be achieved. As intakes of

nutrient increase above the UL, the risk of adverse effects increases. Furthermore, the UL refers to total intake of a nutrient from food, fortified food, and supplements. The total amount of any one nutrient consumed from these sources in one day is very difficult to determine.

### **What does the future hold for the DRIs?**

The DRI reports provide recommended and upper levels for calcium and related minerals,

folate, the B vitamins, dietary antioxidants and related compounds, micronutrients including electrolytes and fluid, macronutrients, and other food components not traditionally classified as nutrients but which play a beneficial role in human diets. It is hoped that the comprehensive scientific analysis of available information will provide valuable knowledge for the ongoing research conducted by the private sector, foundations,

universities, government laboratories, and other institutions in order to provide sound nutritional policy for consumers.

