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neurosurgery

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Neurosurgery Leader Responds to New Dietary Guidelines: A Leap Toward Brain and Spine Health

Washington, DC – This week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) [released](#) the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025–2030, calling for a nationwide return to whole foods, reduced reliance on ultra-processed products, and age-adjusted nutritional patterns across the lifespan.

Alexander A. Khalessi, MD, MBA, FAANS, Chair of the Washington Committee for the American Association of Neurological Surgeons and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons, issued the following statement:

“We thank Secretaries Kennedy and Rollins for their leadership in elevating nutrition as a national health priority and refocusing the guidelines to advance human health.

Practicing neurosurgeons manage the collateral damage resulting from the inability to focus on activity-adjusted caloric intake, reliance on highly processed foods, and excess consumption of complex carbohydrates. From obesity-related spine disease and stroke risk to diminished physiologic reserve in patients undergoing brain tumor treatment, we know nutrition lays the foundation for treatment success.

“These new guidelines appropriately highlight the importance of whole foods, adequate protein intake, and development-stage dietary guidance. The DGA also underscores the importance of the gut microbiome, which we now understand is a key driver of health, and how highly processed foods can disrupt that balance.

“The consequences of poor nutrition play out in our practice every day. Poorly controlled body mass index worsens degenerative spine disease and surgical risk, increases cerebrovascular vulnerability to stroke and carotid disease, and limits physiologic reserve for patients undergoing treatment for primary or metastatic brain tumors. From wound healing to pain management, nutrition is the gateway to accessing modern medical progress. This is particularly true in the treatment of neurologic conditions that represent the foremost threat to American healthspan and lifespan.”

“Our youngest patients are no exception. Many pediatric neurosurgical conditions stem from abnormalities in central nervous system development exacerbated by poor maternal and infant nutrition. Neural tube defects remain a well-established example of how nutritional deficiency, specifically folic acid exposure, can directly promote disease.”

"We also thank CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz and FDA Commissioner Marty Makary for their leadership and for lending their clinical expertise as fellow academic surgeons to this important initiative."

"The neurosurgical community looks forward to working across the public health and medical spectrum to strengthen preventive care and improve long-term brain and spine health for all patients."

The DGA is the federal government's primary nutrition policy tool, developed jointly by the HHS and USDA. Updated every five years, the DGA helps shape a wide range of federally-funded programs, including school and military meals, food assistance initiatives, nutrition labeling, and agricultural priorities. The Guidelines are also used by health professionals, researchers, educators, and families to support informed dietary choices and promote long-term health. To learn more, visit realfood.gov.

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The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS), founded in 1931, and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS), founded in 1951, are the two largest scientific and educational associations for neurosurgical professionals in the world. These groups represent over 10,000 neurosurgeons worldwide. Neurological surgery is the medical specialty concerned with the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of disorders that affect the entire nervous system, including the spinal column, spinal cord, brain and peripheral nerves. For more information, please visit www.aans.org, www.cns.org and www.neurosurgery.org.