



المركز الخليجي للوقاية من الأمراض ومكافحتها
Gulf Center for Disease Prevention and Control

مجلس الصحة
لدول مجلس التعاون
Gulf Health Council



Supporting Document

A Review of Global and GCC National Dietary Guidelines



January 2026

Comparative Overview of GCC and Global National Dietary Guidelines

Table 1 summarizes the recommended daily intakes for food groups and nutrients across GCC national dietary guidelines, alongside guidelines from Canada, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the recently released U.S. DGAs 2025-2030. Countries communicate recommendations in different formats. Canada and the UK have adopted plate proportion models, while GCC countries, Switzerland, and the U.S. maintain serving-based recommendations.

Food groups

Fruit and vegetable guidance varies in format. Some guidelines combine fruits and vegetables into a single target serving or as plate proportions, while others present separate daily targets. Grain and starchy food recommendations also vary in format, although all guidelines emphasize whole grains. Dairy recommendations are reported either as a standalone group or combined with protein (as in Canada), with varying emphasis on lower-fat, full-fat, or unsweetened options. Protein guidance differs in both format and specificity, some guidelines use the number of servings, while others use plate proportions, with most emphasizing fish, lean meats, and plant-based options. The U.S. DGAs 2025–2030 present a protein target expressed per kilogram of body weight in the main document, with serving equivalents published separately in supporting materials ⁶.

Nutrients

Most guidelines recommend limiting saturated fat and added sugars, expressed as either a percentage of energy intake or as gram-based limits. Salt limits range from <5g to <6g daily.

Table 1. Comparison of national dietary guidelines across the GCC and selected countries





Country, Release year, Issuing body*	Visualization	Caloric range (kcal), 19+ years	Recommended amounts of food groups and nutrients**							
			Vegetables (Serv. eq.)	Fruits (Serv. eq.)	Grains and starches (Serv. eq.)	Dairy (Serv. eq.)	Protein foods (Serv. eq.)	Oils and fats***	Salt****	Added sugar*****
GCC Countries										
UAE, 2019, Ministry of Health and Prevention ⁷ View guidelines		Not specified	F: 2.5 M: 3	F: 2 M: 2	F: 6 M: 8	F: 3 M: 3 (recommends lower-fat options)	F: 5.5 M: 6.5 (recommends seafood 2/week, lean meat 2/week, poultry 3/week, along with eggs legumes, soy products)	F: 6 teaspoons M: 7 teaspoons Choose unsaturated fats, limit saturated fat to <10%E, and trans fat to <1%E	<6 g of salt (equivalent to 2300 mg sodium)	<10%E (An additional optimal recommendation of <5%E is noted)
Bahrain, 2023, Ministry of Health ⁸ View guidelines		F: 1800-2400 M: 2400-3000	F: 2-3.5 M: 3-4	F: 1.5-2 M: 2-2.5	F: 6-8 M: 8-10	F: 3 M: 3 (recommends lower-fat options)	F: 5-6.5 M: 6.5-7 (special focus on seafood, and recommends lean meat and plant-based options)	Choose unsaturated fat, reduce saturated fat	<5 g of salt	<10%E (An additional optimal recommendation of <5%E is noted)
Saudi Arabia, 2023, National Nutrition Committee, Saudi Food and Drug Authority ⁹ View guidelines		2000	5 (recommends more vegetables than fruits)		10	2 (recommends lower-fat options)	3 (recommends lean meat and plant-based options)	Choose unsaturated fat, reduce saturated fat to <10%E	<5 g of salt	<10%E (equivalent to 50g)
Oman, 2024, Ministry of Health and WHO Local Office ¹⁰ View guidelines		2000	2.5	2	6	3 (recommends lower-fat options)	5.5 (recommends fish 2-3/week, lean meat, and legumes)	Choose unsaturated fat, reduce saturated fat, limit trans fat	<5 g of salt (equivalent to 2000 mg sodium)	<10%E (An additional optimal recommendation of <5%E is noted)

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Qatar***** , 2022, Ministry of Public Health ¹¹ View guidelines		Not specified	3-5	2-4	Not specified	Not specified (recommends lower-fat options)	Fish 2/week, otherwise not specified (notably, legumes are added as a standalone category, lean meat options are recommended)	Choose unsaturated fat, reduce saturated fat, limit trans fat	<5 g of salt	Not specified (recommends limiting overall)
Kuwait , 2023, Public Authority for Food and Nutrition ¹² View guidelines	None	Not specified	3-5	4	F: 7 M: 8	2-3 (recommends lower-fat options)	F: 2 M: 3 (recommends fish, lean meat, and plant-based options)	Choose unsaturated fat, reduce saturated fat, limit trans fat	<5 g of salt	<5%E (equivalent to 25 g)
Selected Countries										
U.S. , 2026, U.S. Department of Agriculture ¹ View guidelines		2000	3	2	2-4	3 (recommends full-fat options)	1.2-1.6 g/kg of body weight (corresponds to 3-4 servings according to separate supporting documents ⁶)	Limit saturated fat to <10%E, choose oils with essential fatty acids	<6 g of salt (equivalent to 2300 mg sodium)	0%E (If any, a single meal should not exceed 10 g)
Switzerland , 2024, Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office ¹³ View guidelines		Not specified		5	3	2-3 (recommends unsweetened options)	1 (recommends variety with focus on plant-based options)	2 tablespoons of vegetable oils, limit saturated fat to <1 tablespoon, equivalent to <6%E (notably, nuts and seeds are added as a standalone category)	Not specified (recommends enjoying sweetened beverages, sweets and salty snacks only in small quantities)	

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Canada, 2019, Health Canada ¹⁴ View guidelines		Not specified (proportional approach)	50% of plate		25% of plate	25% of plate (recommends lower-fat dairy options, lean meat and plant-based options)		Choose unsaturated fat, reduce saturated fat to <10%E	<6 g of salt (2300 mg sodium)	<10%E
United Kingdom, 2016, Office for Health Improvement & Disparities ¹⁵ View guidelines		F: 2000 M: 2500		5	By plate proportion	By plate proportion (recommends lower-fat options)	Fish 2/week, otherwise as visually proportioned	Choose unsaturated fat in small amounts, limit saturated fat to F: <20 g (equivalent to <9%E) M: <30 g (equivalent to <11%E)	<6 g of salt	<5%E

Abbreviations: Serv. eq.= Serving equivalent, F= Female, M=Male, %E= Percent of energy intake.

*GCC countries are listed in Arabic alphabetical order, other countries are listed chronologically by guideline release date.

**Recommended amounts are per day unless otherwise specified.

***Saturated fat limits are presented as %E. Where guidelines reported gram or spoon-based limits, these were converted based on a 2000 kcal for females, 2500 kcal for males (1g fat = 9 kcal).

****Salt limits were extracted as reported. If only sodium limits were provided, these were converted to salt (1000 mg sodium = 2.5 g salt).

*****Added sugar limits are presented as %E, if guidelines reported gram-based limits, these were converted based on a 2000 kcal diet. Free sugar limits were included under added sugar.

*****As detailed in the development process of the Qatar Dietary Guidelines, serving sizes were not included in the guidelines for all food groups, as a result of the decision to focus on diet quality rather than quantity.

Comparison of Selected Dietary Recommendations Across GCC Countries and the U.S. 2025-2030 DGAs

Across the GCC national dietary guidelines reviewed (Table 2), the documents share several common themes, including emphasis on nutrient-dense foods, preference for vegetable oils, and guidance to limit saturated fat, added sugars, and excess salt. Protein recommendations vary across GCC countries, though they all emphasize fish, lean meats, and plant-based options. Most of the reviewed GCC guidelines advise limiting red meat and full-fat dairy.

The U.S. 2025-2030 guidelines introduce several shifts from previous U.S. guidance and from GCC recommendations, using a different format and, in some areas, different emphases. The main DGA document specifies a protein intake target of 1.2 to 1.6 g per kg body weight per day and lists red meat among protein options. It also states that, when consuming dairy, people should include full-fat dairy with no added sugar. For dietary fats, the DGA prioritizes oils with essential fatty acids, such as olive oil, and lists butter and beef tallow as additional options. The DGA also notes that people may flavor foods with salt, spices, and herbs.

It may be noted that some recommendations within the U.S. 2025-2030 DGAs require careful consideration for practical application, such as balancing the endorsement of red meat, full-fat dairy, and animal-based cooking fats (butter, beef tallow) with the <10% saturated fat limit, and the directions to use of salt for seasoning with the <2,300 mg sodium target.

The guidelines also differ in how they define and communicate recommendations about processed foods. The role of food processing in dietary guidance is an evolving area of nutrition science. While associations between processed food consumption and health outcomes have been identified, consensus on definitions and the strength of evidence has not yet been established^{5, 16, 17}. This is reflected in the varying terminology and approaches across national dietary guidelines.

Table 2. Comparison of selected dietary recommendations across GCC countries and the U.S. 2025-2030 DGAs

Country	UAE	Bahrain	Saudi Arabia	Oman	Qatar**	Kuwait	Comparison with U.S. 2025-2030 DGAs	
Selected dietary recommendations	Grains and starches (Serv. eq.)*	6-8	6-10	10	6	Not specified	7-8	U.S. recommends 2-4 servings , which is less than half the GCC range of 6-10 servings
	Protein foods (Serv. eq.)*	5.5-6.5	5-7	3	5.5	Fish 2/week, otherwise not specified	2-3	U.S. specifies 1.2-1.6 g/kg body weight per day rather than servings in the main guidelines document. Supporting documents indicate this corresponds to 3-4 servings , which falls within the GCC range of 2-7 servings.
	Red meat	No explicit mention	Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit (with mention of its benefit to iron deficiency)	Limit	U.S. explicitly recommends red meat alongside other protein options with no advice on limiting, while all GCC countries advise limiting intake
	Full-fat dairy	Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit	Limit	U.S. recommends full-fat dairy with no mention of lower-fat options, contrasting with GCC guidance to limit full-fat options
	Cooking directions: fat of choice, salt to flavor	Vegetable oils, flavor without salt	Vegetable oils, flavor without salt	Vegetable oils, flavor without salt	Vegetable oils, flavor without salt	Vegetable oils, flavor without salt	Vegetable oils, flavor without salt	U.S. endorses butter and beef tallow alongside olive oil, which may make achieving the <10% saturated fat limit more challenging. As opposed to GCC countries, which advise against the use of saturated fat sources. The U.S. also mentions salt for flavoring, whereas GCC guidelines recommend herbs and spices without added salt
	Highly processed foods	No explicit acknowledgment of the term, with indirect recommendations to limit (e.g., processed meats, soda, salty snacks)	Acknowledgment of the term (Processed Foods), with indirect recommendations to limit (e.g., processed meats, soda, salty snacks)	No explicit acknowledgment of the term, with indirect recommendations to limit (e.g., processed meats, soda, salty snacks)	Acknowledgment of the term (Processed Foods), with indirect recommendations to limit (e.g., processed meats, soda, salty snacks)	Explicit acknowledgment of the term and recommendation to limit them	Explicit acknowledgment of the term, further definition of "ultra-processed foods" and processing classification, and recommendation to limit both	U.S. uses the term "highly processed foods" and recommends limiting them , though it does not use the term "ultra-processed foods (UPFs)". Among GCC countries, Kuwait provides the most detailed guidance, explicitly defining ultra-processed foods and processing classifications, while others address the concept indirectly.

Abbreviations: Serv. eq.= Serving equivalent.

*Recommended amounts are per day unless otherwise specified.

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Conclusion:

This comparison highlights both shared principles and notable differences between GCC and global national dietary guidelines. GCC countries have developed dietary guidelines that reflect regional dietary patterns and local health priorities. These guidelines generally align with widely used international public health nutrition guidance, including:

- **Emphasizing fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.**
- **Choosing a variety of protein sources, including fish and plant-based options, and limiting red meats**
- **Choosing low-fat dairy options**
- **Using unsaturated vegetable oils for cooking, limiting saturated fat, and avoiding trans fats.**
- **Limiting added salt and choosing herbs and spices for flavor.**
- **Reducing foods and beverages high in added sugar**

Health professionals and the public in GCC Member States are encouraged to continue following their national dietary guidelines.

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