

We, the undersigned organizations, encourage your support of a letter led by Representatives Marshall (R-KS) and Pingree (D-ME) requesting that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) undertake the necessary steps to add a symbol for water to the MyPlate dietary guidance graphic.

Water—whether tap, bottled, or filtered—is essential to life. Consuming water helps Americans achieve optimal nutritional health, particularly when substituted for sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs). When water is substituted for SSBs it reduces risks of developing chronic diseases, including obesity and diabetes, while positively impacting health care costs.

Public health experts widely recognize water as a preferred source of hydration contributing to good health. Scientific research shows that drinking water positively influences a number of healthy bodily functions. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) points out that, “Drinking enough water every day is good for overall health. As plain drinking water has zero calories, it can also help with managing body weight and reducing caloric intake when substituted for drinks with calories.” The CDC recommends that adults and youth should consume water every day, and consistently throughout the day.¹

Recommendations from leading national experts convened by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation highlight the importance of drinking water from a young age². Their September 2019 report recommends children between 6 and 12 months begin drinking water once solid foods are introduced, and children ages 12 months to five years should primarily drink water and milk.

In addition, those ages 60 and older are among the most vulnerable to dehydration. An April 2016 report by the National Center for Health Statistics noted that older Americans are more susceptible to dehydration due primarily to a decrease in thirst, a fear of incontinence, slowed kidney function, as well as an increased prevalence of chronic diseases and the use of multiple medications^{3,4}.

The MyPlate graphic – based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans – is the primary tool used to educate Americans about nutrition. This tool currently consists of the following groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy. Therefore, adding drinking water to MyPlate would be a key strategy to improve Americans’ nutrition and help reduce SSB consumption.

¹ *Get the Facts: Drinking Water and Intake, Nutrition, CDC August 2016*. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/data-statistics/plain-water-the-healthier-choice.html>

² *Healthy Beverage Consumption in Early Childhood, Recommendations from Key National Health and Nutrition Organizations*. Available at: <https://healthyeatingresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/HER-HealthyBeverage-ConsensusStatement.pdf>

³ Goodman, A. B. *et al.* (2013) ‘Behaviors and Attitudes Associated With Low Drinking Water Intake Among US Adults, Food Attitudes and Behaviors Survey, 2007’, *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 10, p. 120248. doi: 10.5888/pcd10.120248.

⁴ Zizza, C. A., Ellison, K. J., & Wernette, C. M. (2009). Total water intakes of community-living middle-old and oldest-old adults. *The journals of gerontology. Series A, Biological sciences and medical sciences*, 64(4), 481–486. doi:10.1093/gerona/gln045

We believe that the U.S. should be a world leader in promoting healthy hydration through messaging in the Dietary Guidelines and associated consumer-facing materials to promote a proper diet. Currently, the U.S. is lagging behind at least 48 countries that promote water consumption in their nutrition guidance graphics. As water is essential to life and health, we encourage you to sign on to the Congressional letter requesting that the USDA and HHS add a symbol for water to the MyPlate graphic.