

Should the Government Stop Making Nutrition Recommendations?

Yesterday, you were probably saw some [scare headlines](#) about the World Health Organization's (WHO) announcement of a link between meat and cancer.

Their [report](#) "classified the consumption of red meat as probably carcinogenic to humans," and processed meat "as carcinogenic to humans." As [Ed Yong of The Atlantic](#) and others clarified, however, the WHO's findings are by no means certain and lack appropriate nuance. Yong explains that the WHO is notorious for being "terrible at communicating their findings," and should perhaps be themselves labeled as "confusogenic to humans."

The chaos unleashed by the WHO's report raises an important, more general question, and it's not about meat: Should governmental organizations stop making nutrition recommendations?

On the pro side of governments being in the nutrition business, I think we can all agree that they will always have an interest in the health of their citizens. That interest is even more complicated in nations that provide for some or all of their citizens' healthcare. Nutrition plays a central role in health, so some would argue it's natural for governments to make some nutritional recommendations.

On the con side, though, is governments' recent questionable track record with nutrition directives, which are often based on a limited scientific consensus that can be subject to frequent change. In your lifetime, you have probably witnessed the constant flip-flopping on attitudes toward beef, eggs, fats, and carbohydrates. And as was reported last month [in the](#)

[BMJ](#), the U.S. government's nutrition guidelines are woefully outdated, and have failed to take into account recent, relevant scientific literature. Michelle Obama has taken heat the past couple of years for promoting school lunches that are in part based on these outdated guidelines.

The science of nutrition is young and constantly evolving. In light of that fact, I might suggest a middle ground for governments: depend more on common sense and past tradition when making food recommendations and less on nutritional fads. I still think the best nutrition advice was given over 2,000 years ago at the Oracle of Delphi: "Moderation in all things."