

Using the DINE® Score*: An Index of Healthy Eating To Improve Your Food Choices and Energy Balance

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Darwin Dennison, EdD, CNS (Certified Nutrition Specialist)
Professor, University of North Carolina at Wilmington

Kathryn F. Dennison, EdD, Vice President
DINE Systems, Inc. Wilmington, North Carolina

How the Score is Determined

Your DINE Score, as displayed on the DINE Food Analysis, is based upon a comparison of your actual diet with your ideal diet values based upon national dietary guidelines. If you eat foods that have nutrient values that are within the guidelines, you will receive points. If your food choices do not contain the recommended nutrients, you will not receive points. If your intake of a nutrient is significantly outside the guideline, a minus is given and you will lose points.

The DINE scoring process uses pluses, zeros, and minuses. Pluses (+) show that you are eating within nutrient guidelines, zeros (0) show that you are eating outside nutrient guidelines, and minuses (-) mean that your diet is significantly outside the guidelines. Nutrients and related points are found in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - DINE Point System

Macronutrients	Points	Micronutrients	Points
1. Energy Balance	+10	7. Cholesterol	+10
2. Protein	+10	8. Electrolytes	
3. Saturated Fat	+10	a. Sodium	+5
4. Unsaturated Fat		b. Potassium	+5
a. Monounsaturated	+5	9. Vitamins	
b. Polyunsaturated	+5	a. Vitamin A	+5
5. Complex Carbohydrates	+5	b. Vitamin C	+5
Dietary Fiber	+5	10. Minerals	
6. Sugar	+10	a. Iron	+5
Total	60	b. Calcium	+2.5
		c. Phosphorus	+2.5
		Total	40

The Macronutrients and Micronutrients

The macronutrients section shows the energy yielding nutrients and fiber. These nutrients provide energy and fuel for metabolism and physical activity. They are needed in large amounts and must be within the recommended ranges for optimal health.

The micronutrients section includes vitamins and minerals that are important to your health. Our bodies need only very small amounts of these nutrients. Other food components, such as sodium and cholesterol, are also included so that you can monitor the amount of these potentially harmful food components in your diet.

Losing Points

Minuses mean that the nutrients are significantly outside of the recommended guidelines. Messages are always provided when minuses appear and changing these nutrient levels should be your first priority. The nutrients for which points are subtracted, and the level at which a minus (-) is assigned are listed in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Criteria for Point Subtraction in the DINE Process

Macronutrients	Points	Intake
Energy Balance	-10 points	Less than 1000 calories or 50% or more over Ideal Caloric Level (ICL) [*]
Protein	-10 points	Less than 5% ICL or more than 35% ICL
Total Fat	-10 points	More than 45% ICL
Complex Carb	-5 points	Less than 25% ICL or more than 65% ICL
Fiber	-5 points	Less than 12gm
Sugar	-10 points	More than 25% ICL
Alcohol	-10 points	More than 15% ICL

^{*}Your ideal caloric level is based on your height, desired weight, and activity level.

Descriptors

The DINE Score descriptors (100 - perfect; 99-80 excellent; 79-60 good; 59-40 fair; 39-20 poor; 19-0 very poor) were developed as a relative index to measure your dietary status determined by the number of nutritional guidelines you achieved. Your goal should be 80 or more points that indicate "Excellent" eating. The score quickly shows how well or how poorly you are eating. The score and its descriptors compare "Your Diet" with your "Ideal Diet" and give you a general indication of how well you are eating.

Setting Your Goal

If your food choices yield a score of "100" on the DINE Food Analysis, you are eating foods that contain nutrients within the dietary guidelines for "perfect" nutrition. Keep in mind, however, that most of us are not perfect and that striving for a DINE "100" should be used as a goal. If you can

achieve DINE scores of "80" or better, averaged over at least three days, you are doing an excellent job and are in compliance with the system.

To improve your diet, use "Ideal Diet" as a positive incentive or goal. Start slowly. Select a goal of just a few points more than your baseline average. Each week as you meet your goal, increase the goal until you are consistently eating at +80 points or above.

Using the Messages

The objective is to consume foods that contain nutrients within the recommended ranges. If you are over or under the recommended ranges, nutrient messages are provided to assist you in selecting wiser food choices. Messages explain why the nutrient is important to your health and examples are given for foods you should avoid, cut down on, or include in your diet. Messages also emphasize and alert you to potentially significant problems in your food choices.

Getting Pluses

The DINE Score provides insights into which foods you ate too much of and which foods you should eat in smaller amounts or less frequently. For example, if you received a "0" for too much sodium, you can use the nutrient sorting feature to identify which foods were high in sodium. Cut down on these foods. Using the Food Explorer you can search for and sort foods to identify similar foods that are lower in sodium. Choose these foods and over time your sodium intake will reduce and you will achieve +10 points for sodium. You can get pluses by using this procedure for any nutrient that you are receiving minuses or zeros.

First, Balance Your Energy

The "Ideal Diet" shows the ranges and levels you need for your age, sex, height, activity level, and desired weight, based upon nationally accepted dietary guidelines. Start with making sure you have +10 points for "Food Energy." You cannot have excellent nutrition if you are eating too many or too few calories. This is an indication that your energy is not balanced. Your first priority is to balance your energy and get +10 points in this category.

Next, Balance Your Macronutrients

Next, concentrate on your "Macronutrients" beginning with protein. When achieving protein balance you should balance the amount of animal and plant protein that serves as an indicator that you are eating foods that contain adequate amino acids. Then move on to the fats. If you achieve pluses for total calories, protein, and fats, it will be much easier for your total carbohydrate and dietary fiber intake to fall into place.

Then, Fine Tune Your Micronutrients

After the "Macronutrients" are balanced and you have achieved +50 or more points in this category (maximum score = +60), move on to the "Micronutrients." The Micronutrients are used to fine-tune your diet. This area confirms that you are eating foods that contain adequate vitamins and minerals as well as making certain that you are not getting too much sodium or cholesterol.

You Can Do It

Analyzing a diet of any composition will generate some points. Use the nutrients for which you are getting points as a base to build upon. Pluses show that you are able to choose foods that meet the nutrient guidelines and, hopefully, will serve as an incentive to motivate you to score

more points. Adding points slowly over time reflects gradual modifications to your diet. Make certain that you balance Food Energy, then Macronutrients, and finally Micronutrients. Or you may want to customize your program and just work with two or three nutrients such as total calories, total fat, and total carbohydrates. This makes the process easier if you are having difficulty improving your score. The sorting feature and the Food Explorer were designed to assist you in planning diets.

The Meal Strategy

Another strategy is to analyze your intake by meal to determine at which meals you are scoring the most points or what meals pose problems. Some people eat a good breakfast or lunch and then go overboard at dinner or with snacks. Analyzing by meal and snacks will give you insight into your weaknesses. If snacks or dinner is the culprit, concentrate on this meal. Set up a contingency to improve this meal and reward you for achieving points. After you have corrected the nutritional deficiencies at that meal, you can again start to analyze by "all meals."

Also consider that some people eat very well during week days and then splurge on weekends. The meal strategy can be used on weekends. Start with Saturday breakfast and then meal-by-meal work on your score. Improving your food choices requires continuous monitoring until you have achieved a lifestyle shift to healthy eating.

Planning and Achievement

After you are familiar with the DINE Score and have successfully used it, the next step is to plan your meals and food choices. Start with one planned meal, one day per week. Then proceed to two, then three, and so on. Plan one day, then two days, building up to a week.

Meals should be balanced in calories and nutrients. Approximately 30% of calories should be consumed in the morning (breakfast), 30% of calories in the afternoon (lunch), and 30% in the evening (dinner). This leaves 10% of calories for snacking or a slightly larger meal during the day.

If you eat planned regularly scheduled meals, you will store less fat than individuals who eat unplanned, irregularly scheduled meals. People who skip meals are more likely to be overweight than individuals who do not skip meals. Use the DINE Additional Values and DINE Graph Analysis reports to monitor the percentages of calories for your meals and snacks.

Score and Win

By planning your meals using the DINE Score and eating them as planned, you can be assured of controlling your food environment. Planning will help you to reduce random eating and uncontrolled food indulgences. Planning will allow you to enjoy eating because it takes the stress out of on-the-spot food selection decisions. You will feel confident when you know that your meals and food choices are "Excellent" and you are winning control of your food environment.

Food manufacturers, restaurant owners, food vendors, and even your mother want you to like their foods and meals. Often we unknowingly eat too much, frequently we do not balance our macronutrients, and many times we consume too little of important nutrients. By using the DINE Score, you will become "food smart" and win control over these environments. You will learn to forage out excellent meals from the vast array of available food choices and selections.

Consistently eating at a DINE Score of 80 or above is the ultimate mark of success and a tribute to your achievement. Using the DINE® Score*: An Index of Healthy Eating To Improve Your Food

Choices and Energy Balance will help you avoid the pitfalls of poor nutrition and will help you and your family enjoy excellent nutrition and health.