

Sizing Up Food Portion Sizes

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Large serving sizes can affect OUR size! Sometimes when we try to prevent food from going to waste, we find it going to waist, instead!

News articles abound on the supersizing of foods. Portion sizes are getting bigger, and so are people.

Here are some strategies we all can use to prevent our growing supersized!

Bigger May Not Be Better

Commonly available food portions were compared with standard portion serving sizes of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Guide Pyramid in a research study by Lisa R. Young, PhD and Marion Nestle, PhD, Department of Nutrition and Food Studies, New York University, published in the *American Journal of Public Health* (February 2002). Their findings included:

- Cookies were as much as 7 times standard portion sizes.
- Servings of cooked pasta were often nearly 5 times standard portion sizes.
- Muffins weighed in at over 3 times standard portion sizes.

They found that, overall, marketplace food portions are consistently larger than in the past. They note a popular fast-food chain only offered one size of french fries in the mid-1950s. That size is now labeled "small" and is one third the weight of the largest size in 2001.

To review standard Food Guide Pyramid portion sizes, check www.nal.usda.gov:8001/py/pmap.htm

When ethnic foods are Americanized, the portion size may grow. Several examples are offered by Melanie Polk, RD and Director of Nutrition Education at the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR):

- The American croissant is bigger and contains about 100 more calories than one in France.
- When the bagel was introduced to the U.S. by Jewish bakers from Poland, it weighed 1 1/2 ounces and contained 116 calories. Today's American bagel is about triple the size and calories. It weighs in around 4 to 4 1/2 ounces and may contain over 300 calories.
- The Mexican quesadilla has doubled in calories and increased in size. In Mexico, a quesadilla is a 5-inch tortilla containing around 540 calories and 32 grams of fat.

The American quesadilla is typically 10 inches and Polk calculates that one serving could contain over 1,200 calories and 70 grams of fat.

While these larger portions may be appropriate for an active person, they may be too much for a more sedentary person. However, many of us may not think about decreasing our portion sizes in relation to our activity level.

Sixty-seven percent of Americans usually eat everything or almost everything on their plates, according to a 2001 survey by the American Institute for Cancer Research.

Even lean young men who were considered able to regulate their food intake well ate more when offered larger portions in a research study conducted by Dr. Barbara Rolls, Pennsylvania State University nutrition professor and author of *Volumetrics: Feel Full on Fewer Calories*. They ate 10 ounces of a 16 ounce portion of macaroni. However, when offered 25 ounces, they ate 15 ounces, a 50 percent increase!

BOTTOM LINE: If you're putting on the pounds, check those portion sizes!

Don't Be Penny Wise and Pound Foolish

Ben Franklin warned of being penny wise and pound foolish. Put this into practice with portion sizes.

While you can "supersize" a fast-food meal for a few cents, does adding the extra calories make sense? According to the cover story, "A Fat Nation," in *U.S. News and World Report*, (August 19, 2002), for an additional 50 cents, customers could increase their pastry size at a popular food chain from 3-ounces to 8-ounces. At the same time, they added 370 calories (a jump from 300 to 670 calories!). **Another fast-food chain lets you "biggie size" a hamburger-type combo meal for 39 cents and a gain of 180 calories (an increase from 1,360 to 1,540 calories).**

On average, consumption of an additional **100 calories daily beyond your needs can lead to a weight gain of 10 pounds a year**. Is it penny wise to supersize? Maybe. Pound foolish? You decide. **A THIRD OPTION:** Buy the larger portion and split it with a friend! You save both calories and coins!

BOTTOM LINE: While you may get more for your money with a larger portion size, you may pay for it on the bathroom scale!

Really Read the Nutrition Label

When is the last time you REALLY looked at a Nutrition Facts label on a food package?

For example, a QUICK glance at a nutrition label on a cereal box may lull you into thinking your calories are under control. But, look again!

What SIZE is that serving of cereal? The label may say you're only consuming 80 calories PER SERVING. Now, read a little closer. For example, it may say a serving SIZE is 1/4 cup.

Now, pour out your usual serving size and measure it! Then, compare it to the label serving size. Chances are, you're eating two, three, four or more times the amount on the label.

A study reported in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* (June, 2001) **found the amount of cereal eaten by adults was approximately twice the serving size listed on the box.** That's not necessarily bad. But, if you're wondering why you're putting on weight, this may be one place calories are sneaking into your meals.

The study, which had the main goal of examining the amount of folate and iron in cereals, found several cereals contained more than the labeled amounts. Larger portions of fortified cereals, especially those providing 100 percent of the Daily Value for nutrients, could be too much of a good thing, particularly if you also are taking a vitamin/mineral supplement.

Another label for closer scrutiny is the label on many beverages. Of special concern are those regular soft drinks packaged in 20-ounce or larger containers. The label may show a fairly low level of calories PER SERVING, but LOOK AGAIN! How many SERVINGS does it list? You may be surprised to see the **20-ounce container is supposed to provide 2.5 or more servings** and you usually drink it as one serving! When is the last time you saw someone share one of those bottled beverages with another person or persons? How do you decide who gets the half serving?

Another concern is your body's physiological response to these beverages.

"Various liquids are processed by different mechanisms in the body," according to Rolls. **"The hunger and thirst mechanisms are quite separate. A soft drink will trigger thirst mechanisms, not hunger mechanisms, and add calories without satisfying hunger.** You may end up consuming more total calories than if you didn't take the drink."

NOTE: This effect doesn't seem to hold true for all drinks. **"Milk-based drinks and drinks with some protein will influence hunger mechanisms.** In our lab, we found that milk-based drinks help people feel full and eat less at the next meal," said Rolls.

BOTTOM LINE: Look at the label to learn the SIZE of serving and NUMBER of servings.

Don't Forget Food Safety

Nationwide, 858,000 locations offer foodservice -- up from 491,000 in 1972, according to a 2002 report by the National Restaurant Association. Carolyn O'Neil, registered dietitian and national spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association (ADA)/ConAgra Foods Foundation Home Food Safety program, describes us as becoming a "... culture of 'diners-out' and 'takers-out.'" The potential for a food-related illness from improperly handled leftovers may be increasing.

It's hard to leave extra food behind at restaurants. An April 2002 survey by ADA and ConAgra Foods Foundation found 91 percent of Americans take leftovers home occasionally and 32 percent do so on a regular basis.

How safely are these leftovers handled by consumers? The ADA/ConAgra survey found consumers are still playing a guessing game as to proper temperatures for leftover storage and reheating, and determining if food is still edible. For example, the survey indicated:

- Fewer than 1 in 5 used a refrigerator thermometer to assure their refrigerator is at a safe temperature; 43 percent didn't know the correct temperature for refrigerator storage.
- 51 percent didn't know the proper temperature for reheating leftovers; 85 percent never used a meat thermometer.
- While food may spoil before it looks, smells or tastes bad, 48 percent relied on one or more of their senses to judge food safety.

O'Neil also warned against leaving leftovers out on the counter or under your desk for several hours.

To handle leftovers safely, TWO hours is the maximum time perishable foods should be at room temperature, ONE hour if the temperature is 90 degrees F or above. For best quality and safety, eat leftovers in a day or two or freeze them for longer storage. Keep your refrigerator running at 40 degrees F or below. Reheat leftovers until they're steaming hot throughout, 165 degrees F.

If you're concerned about leftovers and don't feel you'll be able to refrigerate or eat them in a timely manner, ask about portion sizes BEFORE you order. USDA's publication "How Much Are You Eating," advises "If main dish portions are larger than you want, order an appetizer or side dish instead, or share a main dish with a friend."

BOTTOM LINE: If you feel you won't be able eat all of a food at a restaurant, you don't want to leave it behind and you can't refrigerate it within two hours, don't order it!

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