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## How Much Food Should I Eat?

### Portion Distortion

People today eat way more than they used to — and way more than they need to. This means that they're constantly taking in more calories than their bodies can burn. Unfortunately, lots of us don't realize that we're eating too much because we've become so used to seeing (and eating!) large portions.

People who consistently overeat are likely to become overweight. They also risk getting a number of medical problems, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, bone and joint problems, breathing and sleeping problems, and even depression. Later in life, people who are overweight or obese are at greater risk for heart disease, heart failure, and stroke.

It's easy to understand why the food industry tends to serve way more food than is necessary: Customers love to feel like they're getting the best value for their money! But the value meal is no deal when it triples our calories and sets the stage for health problems.

So what can you do to take back control? A good place to start is knowing about two things that can help you eat smart: **servicing sizes** and **recommended amounts** of different foods.

### Help Yourself: The Truth About Serving Sizes

Look at the label on any product package and you'll see a nutrition information section that gives a serving size for that food. Contrary to popular belief, this serving size is *not* telling you the amount you *should* be eating. It's simply a guide to help you see how many calories and nutrients — as well as how much fat, sugar, and salt — you get from eating a specific quantity of that food.

Sometimes the serving size on a package will be a lot less than you are used to eating. In some cases, like vegetables, it's perfectly OK (and even a good idea) to eat more than the serving size listed on the package.

But when it comes to foods that are high in calories, fat, or sugar, the serving size can alert you that you may be getting more than is healthy. Let's say you buy a 3-ounce bag of cookies and you eat the whole bag. If the label shows the serving size is 1 ounce, not only did you have 3 servings, you also had 3 times the listed calories as well as 3 times the sugar.

### Eat Smart: What's Recommended

Serving sizes tell you how much nutrition you're getting from a particular food. They don't tell you which foods you need to stay healthy, though. That's where the U.S. Department of Agriculture's MyPlate comes in.

MyPlate is divided into four sections with dairy on the side to represent the five food groups:

1. fruits
2. vegetables
3. grains
4. protein
5. dairy

There's a website, ChooseMyPlate.gov, that offers guidelines to help people figure out how much of these foods they should eat based on age, gender, and activity level.

### The Divided Plate and Other Portion Tips

Serving sizes on food labels and recommended amounts on the ChooseMyPlate site are usually given in grams, ounces, or cups. Of course, most of us don't carry around food scales and measuring cups. So how can we translate those amounts into quantities we can relate to? That's where the following visual cues come in. (Just be warned: Some might seem small, especially to recovering super-sizers!)

One easy way to size up portions if you don't have any measurements is to use your hand as a guide:

- A clenched fist is about a cup — and a cup is the amount experts recommend for a portion of pasta, rice, cereal, vegetables, and fruit.
- A meat portion should be about as big as your palm.
- Limit the amount of added fats (like butter, mayo, or salad dressing) to the size of the top of your thumb.

Another great way to visualize appropriate portions is to use the concept of the "divided plate." Think of your plate as divided into four equal sections. Use one of the top quarters for protein. Use the other top quarter for starch, preferably a whole grain. Then fill the bottom half with veggies (or a combination of vegetables and fruit). None of the foods should overlap — or be piled high! Not only will dividing your plate like this help you keep portions under control, it can also help you to balance your meals.

### Portion-Control Tips

Being aware of realistic portion sizes and using the "divided plate" concept can help you avoid overeating. But sometimes these visual cues can be hard — especially when foods are difficult to measure, like a sandwich. It can also be hard to estimate foods like chips and cookies that you might eat right out of the bag.

More tips for portion control:

- Eat your meals on a smaller plate so your meal looks larger. A sandwich on a dinner-size plate looks lost; on an appetizer plate it looks downright hefty.
- Avoid taking an entire bag of chips or a container of ice cream to the couch. You're far less likely to overdo it if you put your snack in a bowl, and sit at the table to eat it.
- Don't eat in front of the TV or other screens.
- Try single-serving size foods to help your body learn what an appropriate portion size is.
- Eat three well-balanced meals (with vegetables, fruit, proteins, and starch) and one or two healthy snacks at regular times throughout the day. Skipping meals or waiting too long between them can make you more likely to overdo it at the next meal.
- Add more salads, other vegetables, and fruit to your diet, especially at the start of a meal. This can help control hunger and give a sense of fullness while controlling calorie intake.
- Try not to rush through your meals. Eat slowly and chew well — giving yourself a chance to feel full before you take more. If you do want seconds, go for more salad or veggies.
- Be aware that most restaurant portions are three or four times the right serving size. Try sharing meals with friends, ordering an appetizer as a main dish, or packing up the extra to take home before you begin to eat.
- Don't be tempted to go for the giant value meal or the jumbo drink just because they're only a few cents more than the regular size.

Most important, make it a habit to let your stomach rather than your eyes tell you when you're done with a meal. The key to maintaining a healthy weight is to listen to your body's natural signals about when it's hungry and when it's full.

**Reviewed by:** Mary L. Gavin, MD

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Post Test – November 2020

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1. We don't realize that we're eating too much because we've become so used to seeing large \_\_\_\_\_.
2. People who are \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ are at greater risk for heart disease, heart failure and stroke.
3. A value meal is no deal when it triples our \_\_\_\_\_ and sets the stage for health problems.
4. Serving sizes tell you how much \_\_\_\_\_ you are getting from a particular food.
5. A meat portion should be about as big as your palm.  
True or False?
6. Being aware of realistic portion sizes and using the \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ concept can help you avoid overeating.
7. Don't eat in front of the \_\_\_\_\_ or other \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Add more salads, other vegetables and fruit to your diet, especially at the end of a meal.  
True or False?
9. Be aware that most restaurant portions are \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ times the right serving size. Try sharing meals, ordering an appetizer as a main dish or pack up the extra to eat later.
10. The key to maintaining a healthy weight is to listen to your body's natural \_\_\_\_\_ about when it's hungry and when it's full.

October 2020 Quiz Answers. 1.Nutrients 2.Energy 3.False 4.Nine 5.High-Fat  
6.Balance 7.True 8.Trans Fats 9.Fat Soluble 10.Variety



Southwest Human Development Services  
P.O. Box 28487 • Austin, Texas 78755-8487  
(512) 467-7916 • Toll Free (800) 369-9082  
Fax (512) 467-1453 • Toll Free (888) 467-1455  
[www.swhuman.org](http://www.swhuman.org)

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Elizabeth Curtis  
Training Coordinator  
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