Portion Control

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Have you noticed that the size of muffins, candy bars, and soft drinks has grown over the years? How about portions of restaurant foods like pasta dishes, steaks, and french fries? As portion sizes grow, people tend to eat more-often more than they need to stay healthy.

Larger food portions have more calories. Eating more calories than you need may lead to weight gain. Too much weight gain can put you at risk for weight-related diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers.

Managing your weight calls for more than just choosing a healthful variety of foods like vegetables, fruits, grains (especially whole grains), beans, and low-fat meat, poultry, and dairy products. It also calls for looking at how much and how often you eat. This brochure shows you how to use serving sizes to help you eat just enough for you.

The Difference Between a Portion and a Serving

A "**portion**" is how much food you choose to eat, whether in a restaurant, from a package, or in your own kitchen. A "**serving**" is a standard amount set by the U.S. Government, or sometimes by others for recipes, cookbooks, or diet plans. There are two commonly used standards for serving sizes:

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Guide Pyramid is a healthy eating plan for people ages 2 and over. It shows the recommended number of servings to eat from each of five food groups every day to meet your nutrition needs, and it defines serving sizes. (For more information, see The Food Guide Pyramid under Additional Reading.)

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Nutrition Facts Label is printed on most packaged foods. It tells you how many calories and how much fat, carbohydrate, sodium, and other nutrients are in one serving of the food. The serving size is based on the amount of food people say they usually eat in one sitting. This size is often different than the serving sizes in the Food Guide Pyramid.
Knowing your Portion Sizes


Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 2 cookies (31g)
Servings Per Container About 7

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 110	Calories from Fat 20
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 2.5g	**4%**
Saturated Fat 0g	**0%**
Polyunsaturated Fat 0g	
Monosaturated Fat 1g	
Cholesterol 0 mg	**0%**
Sodium 115 mg	**5%**
Total Carbohydrate 22g	**7%**
Dietary Fiber 1g	**6%**
Sugars 14g	
Protein 1g	
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 2%	Iron 4%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g

The portion size that you are used to eating may be equal to two or three standard servings. Take a look at this Nutrition Facts label for cookies. The serving size is two cookies, but if you eat four cookies, you are eating two servings-and double the calories, fat, and other nutrients in a standard serving.

To see how many servings a package contains, check the "servings per container" listed on the Nutrition Facts label. You may be surprised to find that small containers often have more than one serving inside.

For foods that don't have a Nutrition Facts label, such as ground beef, use a kitchen scale to measure the food in ounces (according to the Food Guide Pyramid, one serving of meat, chicken, turkey, or fish is 2 to 3 ounces).

Learning to recognize standard serving sizes can help you judge how much you are eating. When cooking for yourself, use measuring cups and spoons to measure your usual food portions and compare them to standard serving sizes from Nutrition Facts labels for a week or so. Put the measured food on a plate before you start eating. This will help you see what one standard serving of

a food looks like compared to how much you normally eat.
Another way to keep track of your portions is to use a food diary. Writing down when, what, how much, where, and why you eat can help you be aware of the amount of food you are eating and the times you tend to eat too much. The chart below shows what 1 day of a person's food diary might look like.

THURSDAY

Time	Food	Amount	Place	Hunger/Reason
8am	Coffee, black	6 fl. oz.	Home	Slightly hungry
	Banana	1 medium		
	Low-fat yogurt	1 cup		
1pm	Turkey and cheese sandwich on whole wheat bread with mustard, tomato, and lettuce	3 oz. turkey, 1 slice American cheese, 2 slices bread	Work	Hungry
	Potato chips, baked	1 small bag, 1/2 oz.		
	Water	16 fl. oz.		
3pm	Chocolate bar	King size (40z.)	Work	Not hungry/bored
8pm	Fried mozzarella sticks	4 each	Restaurant	Very hungry /out with friends
	Chicken Caesar-Salad	2 cups lettuce, 6 oz. chicken, 6 tbs. dressing, 3/4 cup croutons		
	Breadsticks	2 large		
	Apple pie with vanilla ice cream	1/8 of 9-inch pie, 1 cup ice cream		
	Soft drink	12 fl. oz.		

After reading the food diary, you can see that this person chose sensible portion sizes for breakfast and lunch-she ate to satisfy her hunger. She had a large chocolate bar in the afternoon for emotional reasons-boredom, not in response to hunger. If you tend to eat when you are not hungry, try doing something else, like taking a break to walk around the block or call a friend, instead of eating.

By 8 p.m., this person was very hungry and ate large portions of higher-fat, higher-calorie foods. If she had made an early evening snack of fruit or pretzels, she might have been less hungry at 8 p.m. and eaten less. She also may have eaten more than she needed because she was at a social event, and was not paying attention to how much she was eating. Through your diary, you can become aware of the times and reasons you eat too much, and try to make different choices in the future.

Controlling Portions at Home

You do not need to measure and count everything you eat for the rest of your life-just long enough to recognize standard serving sizes. Try these other ideas to help you control portions at home:

- Take a standard serving out of the package and eat it off a plate instead of eating straight out of a large box or bag.
- Avoid eating in front of the TV or while busy with other activities. Pay attention to what you are eating and fully enjoy the smell and taste of your foods.
- Eat slowly so your brain can get the message that your stomach is full.

- Take seconds of vegetables or salads instead of higher-fat, higher-calorie parts of a meal such as meats or desserts.
- When cooking in large batches, freeze food that you will not serve right away. This way, you won't be tempted to finish eating the whole batch before the food goes bad. And you'll have ready-made food for another day. Freeze in single-meal-sized containers.
- Try to eat three sensible meals at regular times throughout the day. Skipping meals may lead you to eat larger portions of high-calorie, high-fat foods at your next meal or snack. Eat breakfast every day.
- Keep snacking to a minimum. Eating many snacks throughout the day may lead to weight gain.
- When you do have a treat like chips, cookies, or ice cream, eat only one serving, eat it slowly, and enjoy it!

Controlling Portions while Eating Out

Research shows that the more often a person eats out, the more body fat he or she has. Try to prepare more meals at home. Eat out and get take-out foods less often. When you do eat away from home, try these tips to help you control portions:

- Share your meal, order a half-portion, or order an appetizer as a main meal.
- Take half or more of your meal home. You can even ask for your half-meal to be boxed up before you begin eating so you will not be tempted to eat more than you need.
- Stop eating when you begin to feel full. Focus on enjoying the setting and your friends or family for the rest of the meal.
- Avoid large beverages, such as "supersize" soft drinks. They have a large number of calories. Order the small size, choose a calorie-free beverage, or drink water with a slice of lemon.
- When traveling, bring along nutritious foods that will not spoil such as fresh fruit, small cans of fruit, peanut butter and jelly (spread both thin) sandwiches, whole grain crackers, carrot sticks, air-popped popcorn, and bottled water.
- If you stop at a fast food restaurant, choose one that serves salads, or order the small burger with lettuce and tomato. Have water or nonfat milk with your meal instead of a soft drink. If you want french fries, order the small size.

Remember...

The amount of calories you eat affects your weight and health. In addition to selecting a healthful variety of foods, look at the size of the portions you eat. Choosing nutritious foods and keeping portion sizes sensible may help you reach and stay at a healthy weight.

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