

## Portion Distortion

There is no escaping the fact that Americans' portions have increased. In the last few decades, the standard-sized container for soft drinks has ballooned from 12 ounces to 20 ounces. Some convenience stores sell soda in cups that hold 32 to 52 ounces. A 52-ounce soda has 550 more calories than the recommended soft drink serving size of 8 ounces!

Such an explosion of Americans' portions has likely contributed to the increase in our waistlines. While scientists don't have the data yet to directly link increasing portion sizes to increasing weight, they have found ways that portions affect weight control.

For example, when people are served more food, they tend to eat more. People also eat more when food comes in larger packages. Given a one-ounce (single serving) bag of potato chips, people will likely just eat the one ounce. But with a 7-ounce bag of chips most will eat more than one serving.

It is okay to eat a large amount of one food or have a big meal--**if** you have smaller amounts and fewer calories at later meals. However, some people don't strike that balance. This may happen because they don't realize that the portions they eat are too big. We call this "portion distortion."

To avoid portion distortion, you must know what is a realistic portion size. The good news is that people who pay attention to portions at meals and snacks may be more likely to successfully manage their weight.

### Servings Versus Portions

A **serving** is the amount recommended for a food. A **portion** is what you serve yourself. It is often larger than a serving.

For example, a serving of cooked pasta is  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup. But the portion that you put on your plate may measure 3 cups. That equals six servings. (See the "Visualize the Right Size" box for examples of what a serving looks like for different foods.)

Remember: it is fine to eat more than one serving at a meal, as long as you stay within your daily limits for each food group. For more information on the number of servings you should eat from each food group, go to the MyPyramid Web site ([www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)). For a fun way to test your portion knowledge, go to the Portion Distortion Web site (<http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion>).



### Portion Control at Home

Here are some ways that you can control portions when eating at home:

- **Measure and weigh.** When in doubt about portion size, measure it:
  - If you don't know what  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of cooked rice looks like, measure it and look at it. Put it on a plate or bowl to see how much space it takes.

- Similarly, measure 8 ounces of liquid. Then pour it in a drinking glass and note how full the glass is. You may be surprised how servings your beverage portions add up to!
- **Read food labels.** Many foods come in packages that contain more than one serving. Remember the potato chips example given earlier? Read the Nutrition Facts Label to find out how many servings are in the package and what counts as a single serving.
- **Use smaller plates, bowls and glasses, and mugs.** We tend to fill food containers. Smaller dishes hold less food and make portions appear bigger.
- **Leave food serving dishes off the table.** This makes it harder to reach for second helpings.
- **Focus on the meal.** If you eat while you do other things, like reading or watching TV, you may forget to keep an eye on portions.
- **Eat slowly.** You can eat a lot in a short time if you gulp food down.



### Portion Control Away from Home

Here are tips for eating in restaurants:

- **Learn ways to estimate restaurant portions.** See the Visualize the Right Size box for ideas.
- **Order a lunch portion.** It is often smaller than a dinner portion.
- **Share menu items with a friend.** Have half of a meal or dessert.
- **Get half to go.** Ask for a take-home bag. Use it to store half of your meal as soon as it is served. Or have the server put half of the meal in a to-go container in the kitchen so you get only half on your plate.
- **Order the small portion.** Don't supersize.

### Visualize the Right Size

#### One Serving Looks Like . . .

##### Grain Products

- 1 cup of cereal flakes = fist
- 1 pancake = compact disc
- ½ cup of cooked rice, pasta, or potato = ½ baseball

- 1 slice of bread = cassette tape
- 1 piece of cornbread = bar of soap

##### Vegetables and Fruit

- 1 cup of salad greens = baseball
- 1 baked potato = fist
- 1 medium fruit = baseball
- ½ cup of fresh fruit = ½ baseball
- ¼ cup of raisins = large egg

##### Dairy and Cheese

- 1½ ounce cheese = 4 stacked dice or 2 cheese slices
- ½ cup of ice cream = ½ baseball

##### Fats

- 1 teaspoon margarine or spreads = 1 dice

##### Meat and Meat Alternatives

- 3 ounces meat, fish, or poultry = deck of cards
- 3 ounces grilled or baked fish = checkbook
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter = ping-pong ball