



Picture Your Portions

Obesity is second only to smoking as a cause of preventable death in the United States. Recent studies suggest that not just *what*, but *how much* we eat may be a big culprit in adding on those pounds. There is little doubt that portion sizes are out of control – and super sized portions make super sized Americans. So, how can you keep your servings reasonable when everywhere plates runneth over?

Pay attention to the *servings per container* line on food labels. If your box of cookies is labeled 16 servings but you eat the whole thing in 3 servings, you're not following the label's guidelines and your portions will be too large. Remember, the calories and other info on the nutrition label show what the manufacturer states a serving is, not what *you* think a serving is. For other measurable food items on your plate, it's eye-opening to use measuring cups and spoons to see how close you come to guessing the actual amounts served.

Visualize your Serving Size. It's not always easy to know whether you're eating 3, 6, or 10 ounces of steak, or 1 or 3 ounces of cheese. So use these easy-to-visualize items to help estimate portion sizes:

A pair of dice = 1 ounce of cheese

A deck of cards = 3 ounces of meat

A computer mouse = 1 medium baked potato

A walnut (in the shell) = 1 tablespoon of peanut butter

An ice cream scoop = ½ cup mashed potatoes, stuffing, rice, or a casserole

Use Your Plate as Your Guide. When you serve your plate, limit one fourth of it to meat or protein foods, another one fourth to the starch item, such as potatoes or rice; the remaining half should be filled with vegetables or vegetables and fruit. This way you'll fill up on the foods richest in fiber and phytonutrients instead of the higher calorie foods.

Here are some easy ways to control your portions:

- At restaurants that serve extra large portions, ask for a doggy bag when you order your meal. That way you can save half your meal for later – and half the calories too!
- Split large entrees and get a salad or extra vegetables.
- If you eat fast foods, check out the nutrition information available in the restaurant or on the internet to make lower calorie choices.
- Don't eat your snacks directly from the bag or box. Take a portion out, put it on a plate, and enjoy your snack. Studies show that the larger your portion, the more you will eat.

By simply eating smaller servings, you can enjoy all foods and still achieve your health goals.

Reference

Levitsky DA, Youn T. The more food young adults are served, the more they overeat. *J. Nutr.* 2004;134 (10):2546-2549.