

Healthy For Good Home > Eat smart home > Eat smart articles > Portion Size Versus Serving Size

Portion Size Versus Serving Size



Sometimes the portion size and serving size are the same, but sometimes they are not. Over the past few years portions have grown significantly in restaurants, as has the frequency of Americans eating out. Learn how much to put on your plate to help control how much you eat.

Big portion sizes can mean you're getting more food than your body can stomach to maintain a healthy weight.

Do you know how much you're really eating? Sometimes it's hard to tell if the portions we are eating are the right serving size for our nutritional needs. Portion sizes have increased drastically over the years, contributing to the rising obesity rate.

So how did it get this way?

Consider these statistics from the American Heart Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation study “A Nation at Risk: Obesity in the United States”:

1. Adults today consume an average of 300 more calories per day than they did in 1985.
2. Portion sizes have grown dramatically over the last 40 years.
3. Americans eat out much more than they used to.

Understanding healthy portions can be hard. Here’s why:

- Many of us don’t know what a healthy portion is.
- Restaurants offer extras like breads, chips and other appetizers that add extra calories, sodium and fat but lack any nutritional benefit.
- Some meals have portions that are enough for two or more people.
- Many convenience foods and drinks are priced lower but packaged in larger sizes to sell more.

Clearing up the confusion.

Here are a couple of important definitions from the National Institutes of Health:

- **Portion** is how much food you choose to eat at one time, whether in a restaurant, from a package or in your own kitchen. A portion is 100 percent under our control. Many foods that come as a single portion actually contain multiple servings.
- **Serving Size** is the amount of food listed on a product’s Nutrition Facts label. So all of the nutritional values you see on the label are for the serving size the manufacturer suggests on the package.

Once we understand the difference, it’s easier to determine how much to serve and easier to teach kids the difference between the two. Learn some suggested servings from each food groups you and your kids can eat at mealtime or between meals.

How can we eat and serve smaller portions?

1. **When cooking at home:** Offer the proper “serving” to each member of the family, then put the extra food away. Save leftovers for another meal.
2. **When dining out:** Skip the appetizers and split a large salad or main dish with a friend.
3. **When ordering takeout at home:** Eat one slice of pizza instead of two, and order a small instead of a medium to split among the family so the pieces are smaller.

4. **Watching movies at home or at the theatre:** Don't eat while watching TV or a movie or when you're on the computer. It's harder to control how much you're eating if you don't pay attention to what you're putting in your mouth, and when. At the movies, share a box of popcorn, and avoid the free-refill tubs and skip the candy.

5. **At snack time:** Never eat straight from the bag or box. Measure out snacks, including fruits and veggies, into appropriate portion sizes before giving them to your kids.

6. **All the time:** Tracking your calories helps you monitor your weight. It helps to know what the appropriate serving size is so you can correctly estimate the calories in your portions, especially if you dine out a lot. Using a food diary can help you pay closer attention to what you're eating, how much and how often.

You may be surprised to learn these are serving sizes:

- 1 slice of bread
- ½ cup rice or pasta (cooked)
- 1 small piece of fruit (super-large apples are 2+ servings)
- 1 wedge of melon
- ¾ cup fruit juice
- =1 cup milk or yogurt
- 2 oz. cheese (about the size of a domino)
- 2-3 oz. meat, poultry or fish (this is about the size of a deck of cards)

Last Reviewed 2015

Last Updated: March 21, 2017

Article copyright © 2017 American Heart Association.

Share this Article

