Are You a Victim of Portion Distortion?

Do you know how much food you eat each day? Are you aware of the amount of food on your plate, or the portion sizes, that you are eating? Food portions in restaurants and in the home have been increasing over the past 20 years, but studies show that most Americans seem to be unaware of this trend. Many adults and children perceive large or “super-sized” portions of food as normal. People actually do not realize they are eating more food than typically eaten 15 or 20 years ago. This phenomenon has been called “portion distortion.”

During the same period of time, overweight and obesity in the United States has risen significantly. People are unaware of the role that portion size may play in the development of obesity. Currently, an estimated 30% of all adult Americans are obese and an additional 35% are overweight. The increase in the amount of overweight/obesity is an issue for both men and women, for all racial and ethnic groups, and for all age groups. In fact, data from the 2003 Florida Youth Risk Behavior Survey show that 14 percent of high school students are at risk for overweight, and about 12 percent are overweight. Overweight and obesity among youth have been linked to children developing diseases such as type 2 diabetes, a disease once primarily associated with older adults. Large individuals face many problems in a society that places great value on being slim. In addition, to diabetes there are numerous health consequences including hypertension, cardiovascular disease, stroke, certain types of cancer, gallbladder disease and osteoarthritis.

According to Dr. Linda Bobroff, University of Florida IFAS Extension Nutrition Specialist, “there are many, many factors that contribute to people becoming overweight. One factor that has been the focus of much public attention is the portion sizes of food consumed in this country.” Larger portions add up. Just 100 extra calories a day can lead to a weight gain of 10 pounds per year. Maintaining a healthy weight is a balancing act – we must try to balance calories in with calories out.

The new MyPyramid (http://www.mypyramid.gov) tells each of us exactly how much we need to eat every day from every food group – fruits, vegetables, dairy, grains and meat and beans. These recommendations are based on our age, gender and level of daily activity.

To raise our awareness of how much we are eating, here are several easy tricks for “measuring” food portions without getting out the measuring cups and spoons. Use these common objects to picture the size of recommended food portions.

1 baseball = 1 cup of cereal, 1 cup of chopped vegetables, or 1 cup of chopped fruit
1 computer mouse = ½ cup cooked pasta or ½ cup cooked dry beans, 1 medium baked potato
1 deck of cards = 3 ounces lean meat, fish or poultry
1 golf ball = 2 tablespoons salad dressing or 2 tablespoons peanut butter