

Take Control Of Portion Sizes

Tallahassee Democrat

Shelley Swenson, Extension Agent II, Wakulla County Extension Service—Family & Consumer Sciences-
EFNEP

An American Challenge: PORTION CONTROL

I remember as a child being thrilled about hamburger night with homemade fries. This was quite an occasion because my mother believed in providing very nutritious meals for her family. I reflect back and, by comparison to today's standards, I actually saw the plate under my food; the items on my plate did not cover the entire surface!! Would that happen today in a typical American home and restaurant?

The change in our eating behaviors and portion distortion started slowly. Several decades ago, fast food chains starting competing for the consumer dollar by offering larger portions. Soon "value meals" and "super sizes" became commonplace. Modestly-sized bagels and muffins disappeared from cafes, replaced by creations three times their size. Restaurants started using larger plates laden with more food to assure customers they were getting their money's worth.

IT IS NOT JUST WHAT WE EAT THAT MATTERS, but also how much we eat. According to a government report, the average number of calories Americans eat each day has risen by 250 over the past 30 years. That significant increase theoretically works out to an extra 26 pound every year.

A good way to figure out the actual amount of food on your plate is to becoming familiar with the standard serving size established by the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA). As you review these standards, it becomes clear that these servings are smaller than most people usually eat. For example, the 2 cups of spaghetti covering your dinner plate equals not 1 but 4 grain servings; a bagel served in shops and cafes are closer to 4 or 5.

Portion Controller

An ice cream scoop is useful for portioning foods, including mashed potatoes, pasta, vegetables, rice and cereal. The typical ice cream scoop filled to level holds 1/2 cup or the USDA equivalent amount for many food items. Test the size of your scoop by filling it with water and pouring it into a measuring cup.

To estimate the sizes of food portions, remember these common objects: 3 ounces of meat, fish or poultry = the size of a deck of cards; 1 medium piece of fruit or potato = the size of a 60-watt light bulb; 1 1/2 ounces cheese = the size of a nine-volt battery; 1 cup of cereal (1 ounce from grains group), 1 cup chopped vegetable or fruit = size of a baseball; 1 1/2 ounces of natural cheese = size of 4 dice; and 1 teaspoon margarine = size of 1 die; 2 tablespoons light salad dressing or peanut butter = size of a golf ball.

Portion Control Affects Weight Control

Most people will eat more at a sitting when presented with larger portions than when provided smaller portions. Yet, at the end of the meal, they report about the same sensation of fullness whether the portions were large or small. The trick seems to be to eat just until satisfied, and then to stop before satisfaction diminishes.

Now that you can visualize portion sizes you know that reasonable food amounts allow you to include the variety of foods necessary for good nutritional health. ***Start today for a healthier tomorrow.***

Have a question? Contact the University of Florida/IFAS Wakulla County Extension Office at 850-926-3931, weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. UF/IFAS Wakulla County Extension is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, gender or national origin.