



# Portion Sizes: Do they influence how much we eat?

Portion size is one of the areas that seem to be important in the rising prevalence of overweight and obesity in the U.S. About 65 percent of adults are either obese or overweight in the U.S. About 30 percent of children are either overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. Obesity is a key risk factor for the development of many chronic diseases including heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Analysis of food intake from 1977 until 1996 indicates that portion sizes have increased, especially for fast-food meals and food eaten inside the home for individuals 2 years of age and older.

Research has shown that when people are served larger portions, larger amounts are eaten. This has been demonstrated both for children and adults. One study found that 3 year olds were more resistant to eating larger portions (when served larger amounts) than 5 year olds. So learning to eat large amounts seems to be a learned response to the environmental stimulus of large portion sizes. Larger portions result in a greater calorie intake. Unless matched by increased physical activity, the extra calories will result in weight gain.

## Parents as a Role Model

- Remember that it is the parent's role to determine the types of food served but the child's role to determine how much they eat.
- Parents serve as role models to children for the types and amounts of foods eaten.
- Serve appropriate size portions for the age and activity level of each family member.

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## Family Meals

- Plan and prepare meals at home and offer one or two vegetables and a fruit serving with each noon and evening meal. Fruits and vegetables are relatively low in calories and the portion size is not as important to help control overall caloric intake.
- Plant and grow a family garden to encourage children to like and eat fruits and vegetables that taste good. It is hard for children to not eat a vegetable that they helped plant and harvest.
- Have children be involved in all aspects of the selection and preparation of food to help learn skills needed to ensure healthy eating for a lifetime.
- Serve only milk or water with meals. Limit commercially sweetened beverages including soda pop, sports drinks, and fruit drinks (as opposed to fruit juice) for occasional use only. Serve 100 percent juice once per day.

## Convenience-foods and Fast-food

- Limit the frequency and availability of foods providing primarily calories with few other nutrients such as prepackaged sweet and salty snacks. Read nutrition labels to determine the calories/portion.
- At fast food restaurants, ask for a nutrition brochure of the products served. Make informed decisions. Select smaller size sandwiches or entrees and beverages. The "value meal" may be a saving to your wallet but not to your waistline or your health.
- Carry along fruit or cut-up raw vegetables to help add nutrients and satiety to fast-food meals.

## References

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