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Eye on portion size

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Contributor

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If weight control is the goal, most folks know that portion control is the key.

According to a survey done by the Calorie Control Council, 84 percent of dieters say they are eating smaller portions of their favorite foods to control their weight. Or as the late Orson Welles, the Oscar-winning writer, actor and director, put it: "My doctor told me to stop having intimate dinners for four, unless there are three other people there."

But apparently we need a little help. An American Dietetic Association survey found more than half of folks like to think big when it comes to portions and overestimated the recommended serving sizes for many foods.

Calorie needs

What does "portion control" mean, anyway? It starts with understanding how many servings of each kind of food you should have a day based on your total caloric needs. That can change with level of physical activity. If you move more, you get to eat a larger portion.

Bagel trap?

Think that grabbing a bagel for breakfast counts as one grain serving? Probably not. It depends on the portion or size of said bagel. For instance, the typical deli/bakery bagel is about 5 ounces, so if you should only be eating 6 (1-ounce) servings of grains per day, then that big bagel is gobbling up your budget.

Quick tips for dining out

> Check out the room. If you can't tell much about the portion size when reading the menu or from the server, look at what others are being served. Then you'll know that the mashed potatoes are enough for three people or to ask for more green beans if the portion looks too small.

> A serving of butter is the same as a serving of olive oil. Olive oil and butter contain the same number of calories per teaspoon. So you don't get a larger portion of olive oil just because it's heart-healthy if you're trying to trim calories.

> Cooked weights are often lower than ounces quoted on the menu. This is good news. Restaurants list raw weight of meats on the menu. An 8-ounce filet mignon will shrink when grilled, often by 25 percent, so the cooked portion is actually 6 ounces.

> Plan your next meal. If portions are too big, ask for half to be put in a takeout container before the plate comes to your table. You won't be tempted to eat the whole thing and, because you haven't pushed them around your plate, the leftovers will look and taste better.

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The more calories you burn through physical activity, the more servings in ounces or cups you get to add to this chart. If you want to lose weight, you have to cut the number of ounces/cups on the chart. Go to www.mypyramid.gov to reveal the caloric level and number of servings recommended for you.

VISUALIZE THIS

- Meat or poultry: 3 ounces equal a deck of cards equals palm of your hand
- Salad dressing: 2 tablespoons equal a shot glass
- Pasta or rice, cooked: 1 cup equals 1 baseball equals a tight fist
- Hard cheese: 1 ounce equals 4 dice
- Pancake/waffle: 4 inches equals diameter of a CD
- Cheese slice, deli meat: 1 ounce equals diameter of a CD
- Nuts, dried fruit, granola: 1/4 cup equals a golf ball
- Veggies, berries: 1 cup equals a baseball equals a tight fist

From "*The Portion Teller*" by Lisa R. Young (Broadway, \$19.95)