

Size matters

SELF
2/06

What's on your plate can be three, four or even eight times the amount that counts as a serving. Learn how to scale down and still enjoy your favorite foods.

By Shannan Rouss
Photographs by Alex Cao

If your waitress handed you a dish with a single pancake, you'd wonder where the rest of your breakfast was. But that mini-meal is actually a single USDA serving of grains. Of course, nobody is going to fill up on that sad little portion, and the USDA doesn't expect you to. That's because a "serving" is not the amount you're expected to eat in one sitting—it's a building block to help you put together a healthy, balanced diet for an entire day. The daily allowance for grains, for instance, is six servings. Eat two pancakes and you have four grains left over. Polish off the whole plate at right (a typical restaurant portion) and you've knocked off all but two servings for the rest of the day. If you regularly exceed your daily allowance of any food, you risk weight gain and nutrient imbalances.

Unfortunately, it's easier than ever to overeat these days. In the past 20 years, dine-out dishes have ballooned by as much as 500 percent as restaurants offer more food to lure budget-conscious consumers, a study in the *American Journal of Public Health* reports. As a result, one meal can now blow your total daily allotment for grains, protein and dairy! So how much should you really eat? SELF asked Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., author of *The Portion Teller* (Random House), and SELF contributor Janis Jibrin, R.D., to analyze 12 standard diner, restaurant and deli foods and figure out how many servings are in each—and when you should put your fork down.



One 4½-inch pancake (about 1½ oz) is a grain serving. Have 2 pancakes, and you'll be left with 4 grain servings for the rest of the day.

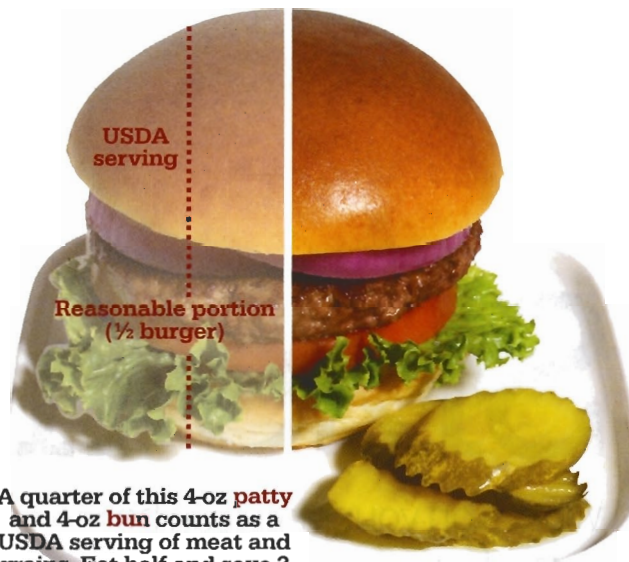
What you get to eat (1,800 calorie diet)		
Food	Servings	The size of a serving
Grain	6	1 slice bread; ½ cup cooked pasta or rice; 1 cup flaked cereal
Meat and beans	5	1 oz lean meat, skinless poultry or fish; ¼ cup cooked beans; 1 egg
Dairy and milk	3	1 cup lowfat yogurt or milk; 1½ to 2 oz cheese
Fruit	3	½ cup 100% fruit juice; 1 medium fruit; ¼ cup dried fruit
Vegetables	5	½ cup raw/cooked veggies; 1 cup leafy greens; ½ cup juice; ½ cup tomato sauce
Oils	6	1 tbsp creamy salad dressing; 1 tsp trans fat-free margarine; 1 tsp vegetable oil
Discretionary calories		You can use 195 calories for treats such as cookies, ice cream and alcohol.



One grain serving is only 1 oz of this 5-inch 5-oz bagel. Go for half the bagel (2½ servings), and you'll have nearly 4 grains left over.

USDA serving

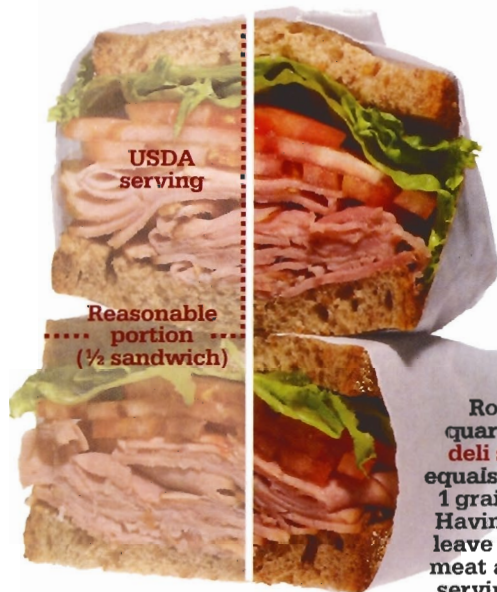
Reasonable portion (½ bagel)



USDA serving

Reasonable portion (½ burger)

A quarter of this 4-oz patty and 4-oz bun counts as a USDA serving of meat and grains. Eat half and save 3 meats and 4 grains for later.



USDA serving

Reasonable portion (½ sandwich)

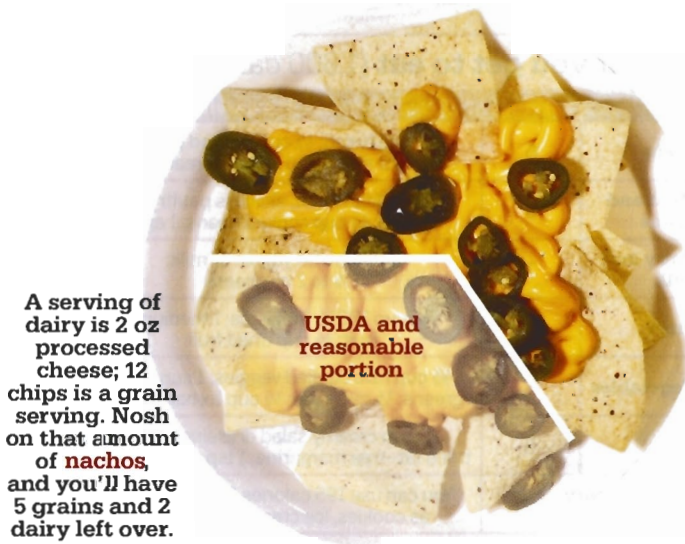
Roughly a quarter of this deli sandwich equals 1 meat and 1 grain serving. Having half will leave you with 3 meat and 4 grain servings for the rest of the day.

A single smoothie can hold more fruit than you should eat all day.



USDA and reasonable portion

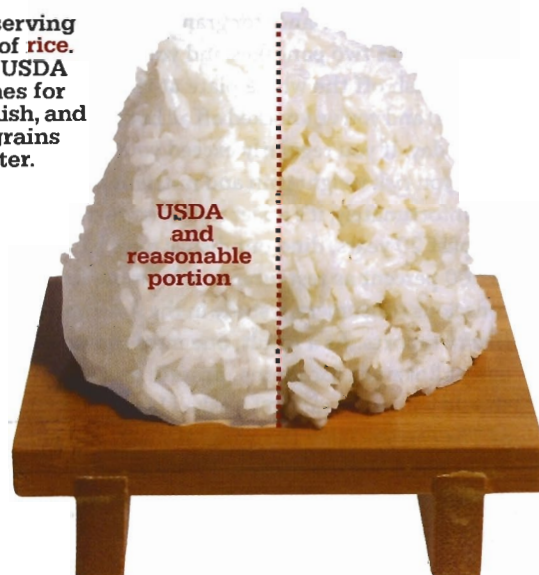
A smoothie is higher in calories than whole fruit, so just 4 oz of this sweet sip is a serving. Add a little seltzer to stretch it.



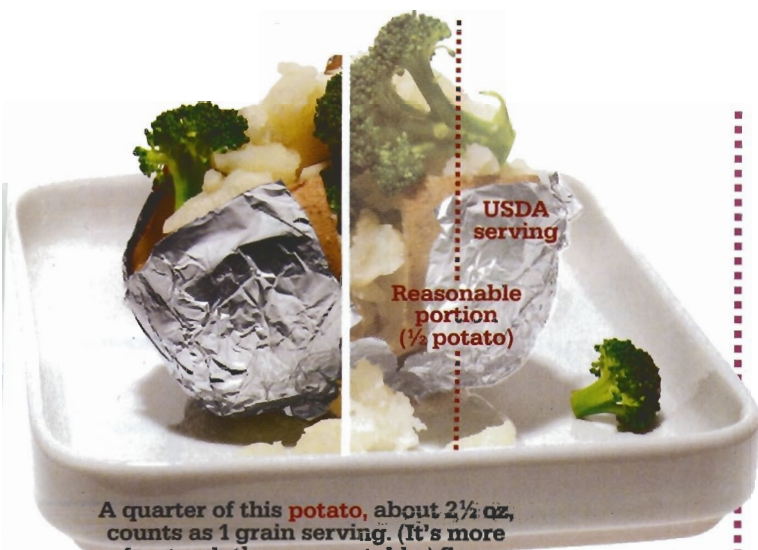
USDA and reasonable portion

A serving of dairy is 2 oz processed cheese; 12 chips is a grain serving. Nosh on that amount of nachos, and you'll have 5 grains and 2 dairy left over.

A grain serving is ½ cup of rice. Stick to USDA guidelines for this side dish, and save 5 grains for later.



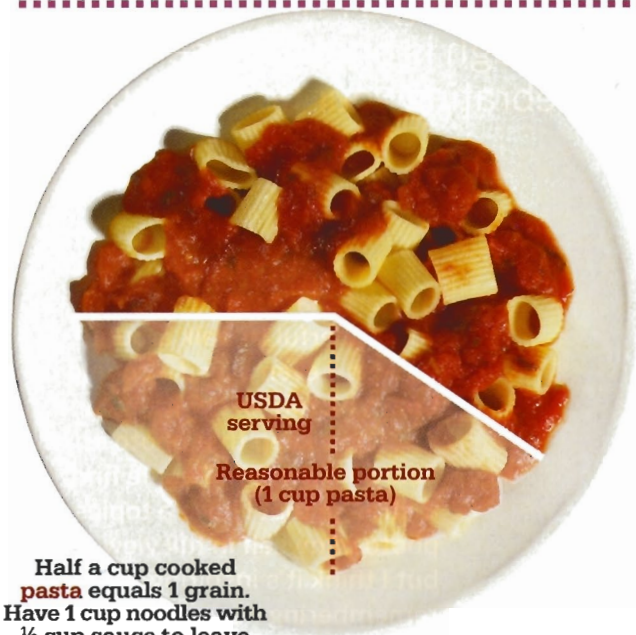
USDA and reasonable portion



A quarter of this potato, about 2½ oz, counts as 1 grain serving. (It's more of a starch than a vegetable.) Serve yourself half of the spud, and you'll use up about 2 of your 6 servings.



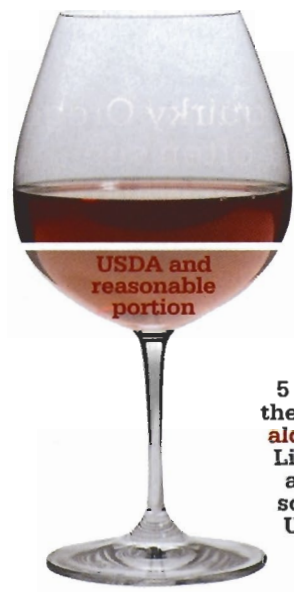
One ounce of this sizzling sirloin is a meat serving. Have 4 oz (roughly half the steak), and you'll be left with one more meat serving for the day.



Half a cup cooked pasta equals 1 grain. Have 1 cup noodles with ½ cup sauce to leave yourself with 4 grains and 4 veggies.



This jumbo 4-oz bakery cookie has more than 500 calories! Nibble on a third to stay within the USDA's calorie range for treats.



The USDA considers 5 oz wine (half the 10 oz here) an alcohol serving. Liquid calories aren't filling, so go with the USDA's limit.

Do-it-yourself portion control

You don't need a degree in nutrition, a scale or even measuring cups to size up portions. Use these smart moves to help keep calories in check when you eat out.

EYEBALL YOUR FOOD Use everyday objects as reference. A 3-oz serving of meat, poultry or fish is about the size of a deck of cards; two servings of pasta or rice is the size of a baseball; a bread serving is the size of a CD case; one serving of cheese is the size of four dice.

SPEAK UP "Ask for half portions," says Leslie Bonci, R.D., director of sports medicine nutrition at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. (An increasing number of restaurants offer downsized dishes.) "That automatically controls the amount you eat." Or order two appetizers; the calorie total is usually lower than that for one entrée.

WEAR WHITE Put on high-maintenance clothes such as a white silk shirt. You'll eat more slowly and carefully, so you can easily monitor your intake. —Maridel Reyes