

Tuscon Citizen

Portion distortion

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Several gadgets and techniques can help you control your portions. Here are a few:

Pita Pocket Diet

This recipe book and diet is based on eating 6-inch pita pockets with various fillings to control portions. The Web site includes tips and recipes, such as Creamy Summer Berry Pocket and Dill Shrimp Salad Pocket, from the book "The Pocket Diet: Perfect Portion Control That Works," by George Kashou and Caitlyn Lorenze (Linx, 2005, \$10 paperback). Visit www.pocketdiet.com.

Do your homework

Portion researcher Sandria Godwin of Tennessee State University says people can be trained to learn serving sizes. Practicing is one way to do that. Every morning, measure out a cup of cereal and half a cup of milk. After a few weeks, you'll know instinctively how much to pour.

Learn from frozen food

A 2004 University of Illinois study compared one group of women who ate two frozen entrees a day and one group who was told to eat the same number of calories in their meals. The meals were comparable nutritionally. The group that ate frozen dinners lost more weight and body fat.

Lisa R. Young, a registered dietitian and author of "*The Portion Teller: Smartsize Your Way to Permanent Weight Loss*" (Broadway Books, 2005, \$19.95 hardcover), cautions that frozen dinners aren't always the most healthful meal option, but are good ways to learn portion control.

Think low density

Energy density refers to the ratio of calories to volume of food. Low energy-dense foods, such as soups, stews, fruits and vegetables, are higher in water and fiber and lower in fat. Focusing on low energy-dense foods can help control calories. For example, include a green salad or broth-based soup with every dinner. A 2004 study at Penn State found that eating more of a low energy-dense food at a meal tended to lower the total caloric intake of the meal.

Trick yourself visually

Several studies have proved that container size affects how much people eat. Using smaller serving dishes, serving utensils, plates and glasses can shrink portions. Even the shape of the container matters. The Cornell University Food and Brand Lab found that people will drink 32 to 43 percent more from a glass that is short and wide

than from a tall, slender glass, even if the glasses hold the same amount. Even worse, they think they're drinking less.

Don't starve

The "proper" serving size of a piece of pie or a steak may seem tragically tiny, but you should not walk away from a meal with your stomach growling.

"You don't have to eat less of everything," says **Young, also on the adjunct faculty of New York University**. "If you have to scale back on that piece of meat you're used to having, you need to add something else to that plate - a nice big salad with a lot of veggies. Scale back on the cookies and have one with fruit."

Don't be intimidated

Eating out is the biggest portion challenge, **Young says**, because restaurants serve such gigantic amounts of food. "It's how they make money," she says.

Diners can split a single entrée and ask to have it served on two plates, although some restaurants may be reluctant to do that. Or they can ask to have only half the entrée served and the other half wrapped up.

"It's up to the customer to demand it," she says.

The Arizona Republic

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Food Portion guide Approximate size You should know

Meat, fish or poultry a deck of cards about 3 ounces A thin fish fillet would be the size of a checkbook.

Peanut butter table tennis ball 2 tablespoons It's high in calories but promotes fullness for a long time.

Pasta tennis ball 1 cup 1 cup would be two servings.

Bagel hockey puck 3 inches Many bagel-shop bagels are twice this size.

Pancake compact disc about 4 inches A serving is 3 pancakes.

Cheese 4 dice 1 ounce Calories vary: Low-fat Swiss has 51, Cheddar has 114.

Note: No studies have been done on whether people accurately can gauge their portions using these guides, and some dietitians are skeptical that they are effective, but others say they provide general guidance and are better than nothing.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture