

Book Review

The Portion Teller: Smartsizes Your Way to Permanent Weight Loss, by Young LR. New York: Morgan Road Books; 2004. 256 pp. \$19.95.

The Portion Teller is full of facts and useful information designed to help readers reduce their portion sizes, improve their diet, and lose weight. A self-described "portion detective," Lisa Young, PhD, RD, makes the case for how the supersizing of the American diet has supersized the American waistline. The book takes a historical look at portion sizes and effectively illustrates the difference between portion sizes of the past and the present. For example, the book notes that in the early 1970s, 7-Eleven stores started selling 12- and 20-oz sodas. By 1988, they were selling a 64-oz, half-gallon "Double Gulp." The examples of these types of what Young refers to as "portion shockers" are plentiful and not only make for a great read but are highly effective in raising awareness about the importance of portion size.

The book also does a nice job of using visuals to get the reader to begin thinking about appropriate portion sizes. A piece of fish is represented as the size of a checkbook, cereal and rice are measured by the size of a baseball, butter or margarine portions are compared to a postage stamp, a slice of bread is visualized as a CD case, and an appropriate-size potato is visualized as a computer mouse. Dr Young also reinforces what is termed the "handy method," which matches up food portions to different parts of the hand. These visualizations are much more palatable for judging portions than is weighing or measuring food.

After making the reader aware of the importance of portion control, and understanding appropriate serving sizes, the book reviews some sound nutritional basics such as food groups and recommended servings. While this approach to building a weight loss plan is not unique, Young adds in many practical

tips and real-world examples of how small changes can make a big difference.

Dr Young advocates the use of a food diary, known as the "Portion Teller Diary," which allows the reader to document and analyze food choices. After keeping the food diary, the reader is asked to analyze choices using a visual checklist of food groups. The "Size Matters" section helps to differentiate between what is recommended as an appropriate portion and what may be served in a restaurant or marketplace.

After mastering portion-size awareness and nutrition awareness, the book stresses the importance of self-awareness. Before developing a tailored eating plan, the readers are asked to identify their "portion personality" for which the solutions to common roadblocks are discussed.

The final chapters focus on using the food diary and portion personality to create a personalized eating plan. Sample meals provide the foundation on which to build a plan, while encouraging the reader to substitute his or her food preferences for comparable items in the sample meals. This approach works well for those individuals who like to follow a structured plan. For those who are hampered by such structure, the portion diary becomes the tool to constantly reassess and revise the eating plan. Finally, the strategies in the "Smartsizes Your Life" chapter foster maintenance and lifestyle change.

The Portion Teller is a sound read, stressing the basic principles of building a healthy diet—portion control, use of a food diary, balance and variety, and lifelong commitment. But what makes this book unique is how these sound principles are packaged. This is a book that is not only practical but also fun. It is highly recommended for the "portion shockers" alone.

—Lisa Chobanian, MS, RN, RD
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