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Bigger Isn't Always Better

Tips for cutting down portion sizes, while maintaining good nutrition

Raised in a culture where bigger is usually better — giant SUVs, super-sized portions, mansion homes, 64-ounce soft drinks, and big-screen TVs — it's difficult to even know what's normal. Americans are eating more calories than ever before, and because we are not increasing our activity to compensate for increased calories we are becoming fatter. Even our children are falling prey to these giant meals which contribute to the childhood obesity epidemic that is sweeping the nation. Today, families are challenged to learn to control portions while still getting adequate nutrients.

A portion is how much food you choose to eat, whether in a restaurant, from a package, or in your own kitchen. Unfortunately, many Americans have a skewed notion of how much they should be eating often because of the large serving sizes at restaurants. By taking the time to understand how much food your body needs, you can learn tricks to cutting down the amount of food you eat and feel better because of it.

The basics ...

- Make smart choices from every food group; variety is key to good nutrition. Start building a meal with a base of grains and add vegetables, fruits, milk, and meat choices.
- Realize that everyone's nutrition needs are different. Check out mypyramid.gov to learn more about how much your body needs.
- Keep it simple. When hungry, you are more likely to reach for the fastest, easiest meal, even if it's not the healthiest thing for you. Be sure to keep your cabinets and refrigerator stocked with a variety of ingredients that can be combined easily to make sandwiches, pasta dishes, or salads.
- Try eating several smaller meals throughout the day to ward off hunger, which often leads to binge eating.

At home ...

- To see how many servings a package contains, check the "servings per container" listed on the nutrition facts label. You may be surprised to find even some small containers often have more than one serving inside.
- Realize you do not need to measure and count everything you eat for the rest of your life — just long enough to recognize what a serving size looks like. Think of it as furthering your nutrition education.
- Take a serving out of the package and eat it off your plate instead of eating straight out of a large box or bag.
- When cooking in large batches, freeze the food you will not serve right away. This way, you won't be tempted to finish eating the whole batch, and you will have ready-made food for another day.

When out ...

- Share your meal, order a half-portion, or order an appetizer as a main meal.
- Take half or more of your meal home and enjoy it the next day. You can even ask your server to box up half of it before the meal is served.
- When away from home, take along nutritious foods that will not spoil, such as whole wheat crackers, dry cereal, nuts, or fresh fruit and vegetables.



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Grain-based mini meal or snack ideas ...

- A bagel topped with peanut butter before you begin your day combines carbohydrates with protein and some fat to keep you fueled all morning long.
- For a tasty alternative to milk, stir low-fat yogurt into ready-to-eat cereal for a breakfast that's ready in less than one minute.
- Wrap thinly sliced cheese, salsa, and black beans in a whole wheat tortilla for homemade Southwestern "takeout." Warm in microwave.
- Stow pretzels, crackers, breadsticks, and ready-to-eat cereals in your briefcase, desk drawer, or gym bag for an energy-packed snack that's ready when you are.
- A slice of raisin bread with a cup of hot tea is a tasty indulgence to enjoy during the cold winter months.