

Portion Distortion

You've probably heard that when it comes to eating, our portions are TOO large. Is this true?

Before we explore the answer to this question let's get a couple of terms straight:

A PORTION is the amount we eat.

A standard SERVING is what government agencies (the USDA and FDA) have established to guide us in our eating.

So now back to the question...

The answer to whether or not our portions are too large is "it depends".

If by chance, a very small chance, you were referring to servings of fruits and vegetables - we aren't eating enough. So don't worry, eat more broccoli, green beans, and oranges. Like everything in life there are a few exceptions. French fries (a potato *is* a vegetable) should not be a main source of vegetables in your life. Also, try to eat whole fruits rather than drinking fruit juices.

What about some of the other foods? We can look at research for the answer to this question. You may be thinking that we don't really need research to answer this question and you are right. But here you go...

Scientists sampled popular restaurants and found that on average:

- Cookies served in restaurants are about 7 times the standard serving size.
- Pasta servings are almost 5 times larger than a standard serving.
- Muffins are over 3 times a standard serving.
- Steaks are over twice the size of a standard serving.

What else do we know?

- Car manufacturers have changed the size of the cup holders in their cars so that our huge drink cups will fit in them.
- Newer editions of some cookbooks have indicated that the same recipes now have fewer "servings". This indicates larger portion sizes.
- The 7-Eleven Double Gulp is a half gallon of soda containing 800 calories. This is about 10 times the size of a Coca-Cola when it first came on the market. How did we get so thirsty?

Over the last 30 years, value meals, super-sized products, and all-you-can eat buffets have distorted what we see as an adequate portion. Sometimes we buy larger sizes because it is a "bargain". After all we can spend 30 cents more and get a candy bar almost twice the size of the regular.

In most instances, getting a lot more for a little more money IS a good deal. However, when it comes to food we may want to look at a bargain a little differently. If we don't NEED more food we are actually just wasting the extra money.

Let's say you saw that snow shovels were on sale. You already had a snow shovel but decided to buy 15 more just because it was a good deal. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but now what are you going to do with all of those extra shovels?

Learning about servings and portions



So how do we know if our portions are healthy?

- Check the food label to see how much makes a serving on the food you are eating.
- Look at the website www.mypyramid.gov to see how many servings from each food group you need each day.
- Try measuring your food for a day.
- Use familiar items to help you estimate your serving size
 - A tennis ball = 1 cup cooked pasta, rice, or ice cream
 - A deck of cards = 3 ounces of meat
 - A ping-pong ball = 2 Tablespoons of peanut butter
 - A CD-Rom = 1 pancake or waffle
 - 3 Dice = 1 ounce cheese
 - The top end of your thumb = 1 teaspoon butter, margarine, or oil
 - The top of coffee mug or mini CD-Rom = the diameter of 1 bagel.

To learn more about L.I.F.E for Kids, St. Vincent's holistic healthy lifestyle program for children and adolescents, call (317) 338-CARE.