

Living



Cure portion distortion

Lose weight now with these 5 easy ways to downsize your servings.

By Alicia Potter

What's less likely to derail your diet: a big bowl of frozen yogurt or a small chocolate chip cookie? If you guessed the cookie, you're right—and you're in the minority. In one recent survey, 62 percent of people said that the kind of food you eat matters more than how much you eat when you're trying to lose weight. But new research on portion control says that's wrong. A study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that women who shrank their portions by 25



Sweet nothings: Just about anything—even sundaes—can fit into your diet if you don't supersize.

Cure portion distortion continued

percent slashed 250 calories a day—enough to help them lose a half-pound a week—and still felt full. Ready to downsize? Here are five easy ways to get started.

1 Trim your trigger foods

Most people typically overeat two or three favorite foods—usually pastas, breads, meats, snacks, or sweets, says Stacey Nelson, MS, RD, LDN, senior clinical nutritionist at Massachusetts General Hospital

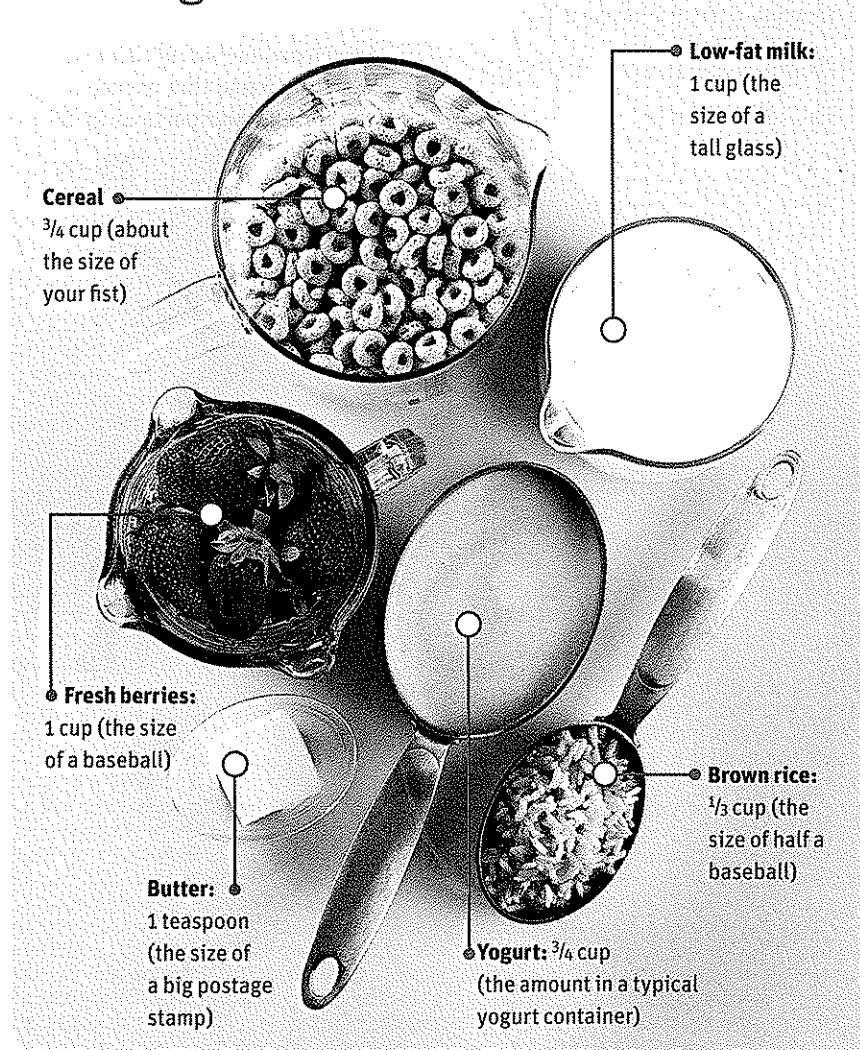
in Boston. It may be that we love the taste, nosh mindlessly in front of the TV, or just hang on to a childhood habit. Nelson's tip: Get to know recommended serving sizes for your favorites, and stick to them as closely as you can. Butter your bread, for instance, with a pat no bigger than a large postage stamp, says Lisa R. Young, PhD, RD, professor of nutrition at New York University and author of *The Portion Teller*. A serving of fish (3 ounces) should be the size

M Mini-meals: Visit Health.com/exclusives for a list of restaurants in major cities where you'll find smaller portions on the menu.

of a checkbook, a serving of steak should look like a deck of cards, and a potato serving should be no bigger than a computer mouse. (For more comparisons, visit www.eatright.org and search for "portion sizes.")

If those portions sound frustratingly small, start slowly. Eat a few spoonfuls less of rice and pasta, or go with half a sandwich instead of a whole. Cutting portions of foods with hefty calories helps you cut calories, period, says Barbara J. Rolls, PhD, professor of nutritional sciences at Pennsylvania State University. And fewer calories equal fewer pounds. Bonus: As long as you don't go overboard, this simple lifestyle change lets you eat almost anything (we didn't mention that cookie for nothing).

1 serving = how much?



2 See less, eat less

"We eat whatever portion is placed before us," says David Levitsky, PhD, an obesity researcher at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. So the trick is to avoid seeing more food than you want to eat. This strategy worked for Susan Pedersen, 40, of Wichita, Kansas. By immediately putting away food after serving herself the right-size portions, she skipped second helpings and lost 35 pounds. "I'd cook only one portion of meat or serve about a cup of spaghetti and then refrigerate the leftovers," she says. "The rest of the meal would be salad with a low-fat dressing and some fruit." Tweak this approach for snacks. Place a small amount of pretzels in a bowl instead of grazing from bags or boxes. And freeze tempting treats like brownies. They won't call out from the cupboard. ➔➔

Cure portion distortion continued

3 Shrink your plates

Try eating dinner on smaller side plates; you'll have less to eat. "When I eat off of a salad plate, I still feel full. It definitely works," says Suzanne Rapp, 33, an equity trader in Boston who shed 10 pounds in less than 3 months. Don't like salad plates? Try dishware designed to keep your portions in check. Mesu (\$50; 973-582-4208 or www.studiopanepinto.com/store/mesu.aspx) offers a stylish six-piece porcelain set that features pastel graphics on the bottom to indicate portion sizes from 1/2 to 2 cups and pastel lines inside to tell you when to stop piling on the pasta (or whatever).

4 Create your own after-meal ritual

Brush your teeth. Chew a piece of sugarless gum. Or sip a hot drink like tea or sugar-free cocoa. These rituals can be cues to stop eating and should help curb the impulse to indulge in seconds or dessert, Nelson says.

5 Try practicing mind over munching

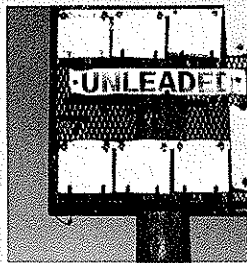
Overeating is often a psychological problem. These mind games may help:

- Think of meat and pasta as side dishes. For instance, fill half your plate with broccoli and cauliflower, a quarter with chicken, and a quarter with linguine.
 - Imagine you're treating your body like a trash can when you polish off morsels you don't really want. Yuck.
 - Many of us are programmed to eat in "units" (one sandwich, one yogurt, etc.), notes a new study in *Psychological Science*. If that sounds like you, stick to small units. Chances are, you won't go back for another—or back to your old dress size. ☞
- Alicia Potter, a Boston-based freelance writer, wrote "Stand Up to Back Pain" for our May issue.*

In Brief

Fill up without gas

Love brussels sprouts and beans, but not their, um, aftereffects? An antibiotic called Xifaxan may help curb the gas you get (and the discomfort that comes with it) when bacteria in your belly combines with fiber-rich foods. Xifaxan (generic name rifaximin) reduced gas pain and frequency by 40 percent in a recent study at the American University of Beirut. People with problem gas could get lasting relief with 10-day doses several times a year. Rifaximin may also help if you have occasional gas, researchers say, adding that OTC remedies like Bean-O don't seem to work. Side effects are rare. Ask your doctor if it's a good choice for you.



A first: Flushable pads and panty liners

We love it when life gets a little more convenient *and* planet-conscious at the same time. The latest example: A Canadian company recently introduced Flushaway pads and panty liners, the first fully flushable and biodegradable feminine products. While the plastics in regular pads take up to 300 years to break down, Flushaway's plastics break down almost completely in 28 days. Get 'em at Wal-Mart and Kmart stores; find out more at www.flushaway.com.

The DIY trick that makes giving birth easier

It's not the kind of massage you'll get at a spa. But if you're pregnant, a so-called perineal massage may help you avoid an episiotomy. A new research review says the massage can reduce the need for one by 15 percent. The technique also reduces tearing during birth and pelvic pain for 3 months afterward. Here's how to do it: Put a water-based lubricant on your thumbs and insert them into your vagina. Press downward, toward your butt, and then stretch the sides, moving in a U shape. It may hurt a little at first, but it gets easier as the tissues expand. Do it for 10 minutes a day, at bedtime or in the tub, for the last 4 weeks of pregnancy.

Too many potatoes may lead to diabetes

Eating spuds once a day—or french fries twice a week—hikes your risk of type 2 diabetes by nearly 20 percent, according to Harvard University's 85,000-woman, 20-year Nurses' Health Study. Some researchers believe that after years of eating starchy foods (like potatoes) that release a lot of sugar into your blood, your body stops producing enough insulin to handle the sugar, causing diabetes. Try substituting sweet potatoes, brown or wild rice, or beans.

