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How to control portions

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If maintaining a healthy weight is your goal, the last thing you want to do is eat two or three servings of something thinking you're only eating one. But what exactly is "one" serving?

Not knowing the answer to this fundamental question is apparently at the root of why many Americans suffer from what experts refer to as "portion distortion." Rather than knowing and eating correct portion sizes, we typically think in terms of eating the whole bowl, the whole bag or cleaning the whole plate, versus stopping after eating only one serving.

From this distorted view, a two-pound bag of peanut M&M's constitutes one portion. A restaurant's turkey-sized serving platter of spaghetti and meatballs is also only one portion. When craving a salty snack, the extra value bag of chips counts as one portion and to wash it down, so too does the giant 64-ounce soda from the corner mini-mart.

It doesn't help that food packaging and restaurant portions have steadily increased over the last thirty years and it's certainly no coincidence that obesity rates among Americans have steadily grown as well.

Our sedentary lifestyles also play a decisive roll in America's obesity rate, but interestingly enough a study conducted by Summa Health of Akron, Ohio found portion control to be a bigger player. When compared to weight loss strategies such as reducing fat consumption, increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, increasing physical activity, or increasing planned exercise, it was portion control that related to the greatest amount of weight loss among study participants.

Think you're immune to the portion distortion phenomena? Then you've just got to visit the Dept. of Health & Human Services NHLBI Portion Distortion Quiz website (<http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion/>). You'll get the skinny, or in this case the fat, of how much portions have increased over the years as well as a pretty good idea of how much activity it requires to burn these portions off our hips.

Another excellent resource for gaining an accurate picture of portion sizes is the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's My Pyramid website (<http://www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramid.org>). Type in your age, sex, and activity level to not only gain a clear perspective on portions, but to more specifically find out exactly how many portions your body needs to reach and maintain a healthy weight.

I also really like the book, "*The Portion Teller: Smartsizes Your Way to Permanent Weight Loss*," by *Lisa Young, PhD., R.D., C.D.N.* -- available at amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com. **Young**, a nationally recognized nutrition consultant will teach you how to better understand portion sizes by equating them to simple visuals such as a deck of cards, a yo-yo or a baseball. The book's individualized plans also work to help you lose weight without weighing food or counting calories.

Young's book as well as the Portion-distortion and My Pyramid websites are excellent ways to become less portion-distorted and certainly more portion aware. What follows will be a smarter, slimmer, and healthier version of you!

(Distributed by Scripps Howard News Service)

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