

The Portion Teller

From Fiona Haynes, *Your Guide to Low Fat Cooking*.

Smartsize Your Way to Permanent Weight Loss

Guide Rating - ★★★★★

Forget diets. They're dull, difficult and involve too much deprivation. According to Lisa Young, author of "The Portion Teller," and the nutritionist featured in the "Super Size Me" movie, the way to permanent weight loss is to develop portion awareness. We should worry less about what we eat and more about how much we eat.

Portion Distortion

Our idea of what constitutes a serving of a particular food has changed over the years, abetted by a food industry that changed its definitions of small, medium and large; where large isn't the biggest size offered any more, and where small sometimes isn't even an option on the menu. This portion distortion, as Dr. Young calls it, is illustrated in "The Portion Teller" as a timeline of size-inflation, showing how common portion sizes of everyday foods have grown over the years.

Portions vs. Servings

We equate a portion of food—what we are given or what we choose to eat—with a serving, which is a more technical definition, and which is almost always smaller than what we actually eat. According to "The Portion Teller" today's bagels are equivalent to 5 servings of grains, yet we think of a bagel as being only one serving. We see the single unit—the bagel—rather than what it represents. This kind of portion distortion is the reason we're heavier than ever and gaining weight at a faster rate than before.

Eyeballing It

"The Portion Teller" gives us the tools to size up portions properly so we can figure out the number of servings in a given food. We're used to dealing in cups and tablespoons, but clearly they don't give us enough of a clue. Dr. Young presents more practical visual aids including a golf ball, a baseball, a yo-yo, a deck of cards, dice, a finger, a CD case, and so on. Once we've trained ourselves to understand what these represent, we can learn to restrict the amount we eat and choose more wisely within the food groups.

It's something of a shock to see how small a serving can be: a yo-yo-sized bagel seems minuscule, and a piece of meat the size of a deck of cards isn't very big, either. But this is the point. We've become so used to overeating that what used to be considered "normal" looks small these days. Dr. Young says if we want to feel full, we should eat more nutrient-dense choices, or what she terms "smart bets." This is a nod in the direction of [Volumetrics](#): fill up on fiber, water-based foods such as fruits and vegetables, and limit the quantity of meat, pasta and fatty foods on our plates.

Portion Telling

By learning the [food groups](#), the smart choices within them, the number of servings a day we need from each food group, and what those serving sizes look like, we can take control of how much we eat. If this sounds overwhelming, Dr. Young guides us through the steps we should take to get to that point. Not surprisingly, she recommends keeping a diary (at least to begin with) to track what kind of eater we are. She troubleshoots all kinds of eating "personalities," offering plenty of tips and suggestions for modifying a particular eating behavior.

"The Portion Teller" is a weight loss book (not a diet book!) that offers a wealth of practical information and advice to help us take control of our eating habits, without requiring us to give up the foods we love.

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