

# Portion Distortion

By Ellen Loure



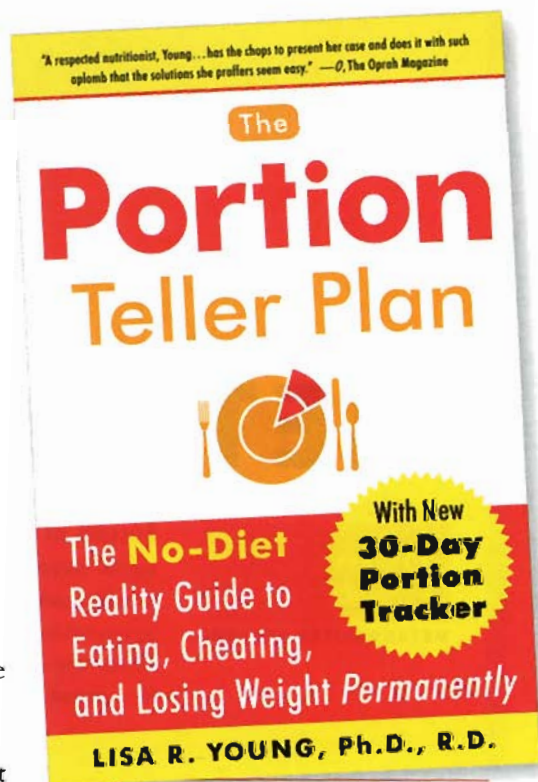
Do you suffer from portion distortion? Has your waistline expanded over the past decade? Do you ever wonder about the real reason you're not losing weight?

With two-thirds of the population overweight or obese, you would think consumers would be more aware of the amount of food they eat on a daily basis. Not only have our waistlines grown over the past 30 years, but food portion sizes have greatly increased at the same time as our daily activity has severely decreased. This leads to an excess intake of food, which is not used for fuel, but instead stored as fat in our bodies. How do we put a stop to this epidemic? First things first – look at what and how much we are eating.

A research study conducted by Pennsylvania State University shows that we eat more when larger food portions are placed in front of us – 30 to 50 percent more! In the past few decades, foods that we purchase have more than doubled in size. And, we give up all control of food portions when we eat outside our homes. We are lured into buying the “Big Grab” size bag of chips for only a few cents more, but we end up eating all 3.5 servings in one sitting. Our brain doesn't register that we're full until we've eaten up to 60% more than the smaller portion that would have satisfied us.

Let's look at some shocking facts from the book *The Portion Teller Plan* by Lisa Young:

- In the three years between 1984 and 1987, the same chocolate chip cookie recipe on the back of the package of Nestle's toll-house semi-sweet chocolate morsels scaled down the number of cookies it makes from 100 to 60.
- A queen-size bed is now 6 inches wider than it was in the 1970s.
- When Yankee stadium was built in the 1920s, it had 82,000 seats. The remodeled version has only 49,000 seats.
- The top-selling clothing size for women jumped from size 8 to size 14 in less than 20 years.
- A typical muffin weighs in at over 6 ounces and contains more than an *entire day's worth* of whole grains as recommended by the U.S. government's dietary guidelines for Americans.
- Moviegoers who said the popcorn tasted stale still ate 61 percent more when given a larger container than a smaller one. Even when it doesn't taste great, people still eat more out of a large container.
- A glass of wine at a restaurant or bar is likely to be twice as large as it was in the 1970s.



*The Portion Teller Plan*  
By Lisa Young, Ph.D., R.D.  
Available at Brookline Booksmith,  
Amazon.com, and other fine  
booksellers.

### Examples of Portion Size Inflation through the Years

Food	1960	2000
Bagel	2 - 3 ounces	4 - 6 ounces
Muffin	2 - 3 ounces	5 - 7 ounces
Bottle of soda	6.5 fluid oz.	20 fluid oz.
Bag of chips	1 ounce	2 - 4 ounces
Fast-food french fries	2.4 oz.	2.4 - 7.1 oz
Pasta entrée	1.5 cups	3 cups

Most people who watch what they eat look at the food label to check calories, fat, or sugar. That's great information, but before your eyes glance down the nutrition facts, it's important to read the serving size listed on the label. The serving size is the basis for all the nutrition information listed, including calories, carbohydrates, fat, sodium, and fiber. Don't assume that the serving size will match the portion you typically eat – they are rarely the same. Your actual portion may contain several servings. For example, the label on a box of pasta lists the serving size as 2 ounces dry. This translates into 1 cup of cooked pasta, but the portion you might serve yourself or get at a restaurant could be *triple* that amount.

Remember that when your servings go up in size, so do the calories, fat, sugar, and salt. Weighing food, counting calories, points, carbohydrates, etc. is time consuming and rather obsessive. Instead, reinvest in shrinking your waistline by becoming aware of your portion sizes. Purchase a set of plates, bowls, and glasses that are smaller in size in

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order to decrease your portions while still cleaning your plate. As you educate yourself on healthy portion sizes, you'll be able to eat sensible portions of the foods you love, instead of cutting them out entirely and feeling deprived.

### **Tips on Estimating Portion Sizes**

A deck of playing cards = one serving (three ounces) of meat, poultry, or fish.

Half a baseball = one serving (one-half cup) of fruit, vegetables, pasta, or rice.

Your thumb = one serving (one ounce) of cheese.

A small hand holding a tennis ball = one serving (one cup) of yogurt or chopped fresh greens.

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