

# San Antonio Express-News

## Altered plates

Smaller portions vital to losing weight

by *Paula Hunt*

EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

02/06/2006

MONDAY

S.A. Life

01C

Clean Plate Club members, prepare to burn your membership cards.

It's perfectly fine to be a card-carrying member of the "leave no ort behind" association when you sit down to a plate filled with a healthy quantity of victuals.

But visit a restaurant or grocery store and you'll see that heaving portions and trough-like feeding habits have become the norm.

We may eat with our eyes, as the saying goes, but we have lost sight of what an appropriate amount of food looks like.

"We totally have," says **Lisa Young**, a registered dietitian and author of "The Portion Teller" (\$19.95, Morgan Road Books). "We see the food, we buy the food, we eat the food. We like things that are big and the big portions."

But portions are not the same as servings. While the two terms are often used interchangeably, they actually have two different meanings.

A serving is a standard measurement of food used in dietary recommendations, such as 1 1/2 ounces of cheese or a one-half cup of vegetables.

A portion is the amount of food you actually eat; it can be bigger or smaller than a recommended serving. For example, a standard serving of meat or chicken is 3 ounces, while a portion is the amount of damage you do to one of Lulu's Bakery & Café's chicken fried steaks.

Not only are we unable to differentiate between serving and portion sizes, we are also out of touch with our body's signals that tell us we've had enough. Numerous studies show that the amount of food we consume isn't necessarily determined by how hungry we are. Scarily enough, it is determined by how much food is placed in front of us -- whether it's on a plate, in a bag or in a bottle.

The problem?

The plates, bags and bottles are getting bigger.

Much bigger.

A 2003 study published in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association found that, over the past 20 years, marketplace portions -- from packaged foods to restaurant meals -- have increased up to eightfold.

Bagels have ballooned to the size of small tires and pasta is now served in bowls suitable for a Neapolitan mastiff.

"People eat more when they're given more food, and they don't even realize it," says **Young**.

Paralleling the portion-size explosion that has somehow escaped our attention are our ever-expanding waistlines, which haven't.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, obesity rates among adults doubled between 1980 and 2002 to 30 percent. At the same time, the rate of overweight children ages 6 to 19 rose to 16 percent, an increase of 45 percent.

If you want to lose weight, start by looking at the quantity of food you eat. A study published in the Sept. 9, 2004, issue of *Obesity Research* determined that portion control was the most effective means of losing weight and keeping it off among 300 obese or overweight individuals enrolled in a weight-loss program.

"Portion control is one of the first things that I work with people on, especially for people who do not want strict diets and who do not want to measure and get into the details of dieting," says Linda Farr, a registered and licensed dietitian and owner of Nutrition Associates of San Antonio.

"If your hunger and fullness signals are working properly, you can listen to your own body and you'll know when you're full. The problem is so many people don't know what it feels like to be hungry or to be full, or they're not paying attention."

Since it's easier to control serving sizes at home, nutrition experts suggest starting your education there by measuring your food.

"Pull out the measuring cup and the scale once or twice just for practice," says **Young**. "You don't have to do it all the time, but you see what it actually looks like. If you don't want to do that, use some of the visuals just to give you an eyeball, like 3 ounces (of meat) looks like a deck of cards. You don't have to be exact, but you want to have a clue."

That how much we eat is as critical a component to weight loss and health as what we eat can be a difficult concept for many people to accept, say nutrition experts.

"It's what I try to get across to people in my classes," says Peggy Visio, a registered dietitian and assistant professor in the School of Allied Health Sciences at the University of Texas Health Science Center. "You don't have to be on any special diet. Just count your calories, measure your food and limit your intake."

Visio says she lost 50 pounds by counting calories and measuring her food.

"I didn't change the way I was cooking for my family at all, I changed my portions."

Yes, you can lose weight even if you clean your plate, as long as you expend more calories than you take in.

But the Clean Plate Club of yesteryear is an outdated -- not to mention unhealthy -- remnant of less plentiful times that could not have foreseen today's 20-ounce steaks and tombstone-like slabs of cheesecake. So, if you're not crazy about associating in a club that would have you as a member, perhaps now is the time to consider handing in your resignation.

## **Original dinner**

Sirloin steak dinner from a local family-style chain restaurant with serving equivalents:

8.5-ounce sirloin steak

1 cup mashed potatoes

3.5 ounces of bread

2 cups of salad with lettuce, tomatoes, onions

1 ounce croutons

1 ounce cheese

1/2 cup blue cheese dressing

17.5-ounce piece of chocolate cake with raspberry sauce

---

## **Re-plated dinner**

Servings that conform to the USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005:

3-ounce sirloin steak (3 ounces meat = a deck of cards)

1/2 cup mashed potatoes (1/2 cup = half a baseball)

1 ounce bread (1 slice = CD case), 1 teaspoon butter (1 teaspoon = a postage stamp)

2 cups salad with lettuce, tomatoes, onions

1 tablespoon (size of a 16-ounce-bottle cap) blue cheese dressing

2.5 ounces chocolate cake with raspberry sauce (discretionary calories)

Visual equivalents are from 'The Portion Teller: Smartsizes Your Way to Permanent Weight Loss' (Morgan Road Books, \$19.95) by **Lisa R. Young**, Ph.D.

---

---

## **What's a serving?**

### **A serving**

is a standard unit of measure used as a guide for how much to eat and to identify the nutrient and calorie content of food. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's My Pyramid and Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 contain recommendations for the number of servings from each food group based on age and activity level.

## **A portion**

is the amount of food you choose to eat. It can be more or less than a serving.

*A portion is the amount of food that you actually eat.*

*A 2003 AICR survey reported that 20 percent of Americans said the portions they eat at home are getting larger.*

*A 2002 American Dietetic Association survey found that respondents routinely overestimated the amount of serving sizes for foods they dished up at home.*

*78% of Americans believe what they eat is more*

---

## **Strategies for dining out**

'By my estimates, you get three to four times as much (food) as you need when you eat out,' says Linda Farr, a registered and licensed dietitian and owner of Nutrition Associates of San Antonio. Here are some strategies to keep portions in control when eating out:

--Order an appetizer such as a broth soup or a vegetable, then share an entrée with another person.

--Ask for a doggie bag to be brought when your entrée is served. Leave a serving on your plate while putting the remainder in the carryout container.

--Order an appetizer as your main dish. 'You will not leave hungry if you order a salad and an appetizer,' says **Lisa Young**, Ph.D., RD, author of 'The Portion Teller: Smartsize Your Way to Permanent Weight Loss' (Morgan Road Books, \$19.95) and adjunct assistant professor in the department of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University.

Portion distortion has even crept into our homes, as **Young** discovered when she compared old and new editions of the 'Joy of Cooking' cookbooks. 'I found, much to my shock, that identical recipes with the exact same ingredients yielded fewer servings than in the past. The brownie recipe used to cut into 30 brownies, but now it only makes 16. They're telling us to cut that brownie into a bigger size.'

---

## **Discouraging numbers**

--In 1955, a meal at Burger King consisting of a soda (12 oz.), French fries (2.6 oz.) and hamburger (3.9 oz.) would set you back 630 calories. Compare that with today's king-size soda (42 oz.), king-size fries (6.9 oz.) and a Double Whopper (12.6 oz.) for a gut-busting 1,890 calories.

--We're doing a very poor job sizing our meals. According to a 2002 survey conducted by the American Dietetic Association, respondents routinely overestimated the amount that constitutes a serving size.

--A 2003 American Institute for Cancer Research survey reported that 20 percent of Americans said they are eating larger portions at home.

--According to an American Institute for Cancer Research report, 30 percent of Americans say they are members of the Clean Plate Club. And 69 percent of diners said they finish their restaurant entrées most of the time or always.

--78 percent of Americans incorrectly believe that what they eat is more important than how much they eat when it comes to weight loss. (AICR, 2003)

--30 percent of Americans say the amount they eat is based on the amount of food they are served. Numerous research studies have shown that the more we're served, the more we eat. (AICR, 2003)

---

1. The restaurant salad includes croutons, cheese and one-half cup blue cheese dressing, while the sensible salad includes only the lettuce, tomatoes and onions with one tablespoon of dressing. 2. Instead of a 17.5-ounce piece of chocolate cake with raspberry sauce, the wiser choice would be a 2.5 ounce slice. PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JUANITO GARZA, PAULA HUNT AND MARTHA STROUD/STAFF

STATE&METRO

**NICA ID: 6823144**

*All content (c) San Antonio Express-News*