

the eat-anything, no-fail diet

What's the *real* secret to weight loss? You don't have to tally up calories, carbs or fat grams. You just need to avoid portion pitfalls with these 13 foolproof strategies.

By Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., R.D.
Photography by Plamen Petkov

Stuck in a weight-loss rut? Here's a hint: it's not *what* you eat that makes you pack on the pounds. According to Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., R.D., a professor in New York University's department of nutrition, food studies and public health, it's *how much*. Armed with a food scale, a camera and a notebook, Young hit the streets of Manhattan as a self-described "portion detective" and recorded the exact size and weight of typical foods across the city.

Here, she reveals her groundbreaking findings from her book *The Portion Teller: Smartsizes Your Way to Permanent Weight Loss* (Morgan Road Books, 2005). Read on and learn to combat out-of-control food sizing at home, in restaurants and at the grocery store. ►

how to avoid supermarket portion pitfalls

Now, more than ever, jumbo-size food packages clog the aisles of grocery stores across the country. There are four simple tips for navigating this supermarket minefield:

Don't be lured by savings. Avoid economy-sized bags and boxes of food. It's OK to buy bulk paper towels – you don't eat them and they don't get stale. Although supersize packages may save you a dollar here or there, they are no health bargain. Why? Because unless it's water, size matters. A larger portion, regardless of the food, contains more calories. It's not an issue of too many carbs, fats or protein. If eaten in excess, any of these nutrients will make you gain weight.

Beware – restaurant serving sizes have more than doubled in the last 20 years.

Buy single-serving portions whenever possible. If you're the type who eats ice cream by the carton, buy frozen pops, ice cream sandwiches or other single-serving items instead.

Read food labels. Always check for the number of servings per container – you may be surprised. Beware of tiny snacks, such as bite-size crackers and cookies. Their size is deceptive, often luring you into a nibble here, a nibble there, until you've eaten much more than you intended.

Make healthy foods your priority. Load your cart with healthful choices before going to the bakery, candy and snack aisles. Fill up on fresh fruits and veggies.

how to avoid at-home portion pitfalls

We've become so accustomed to bigger servings in restaurants that large portions have crept into our homes as well. We eat off big dishes and cook from books that suggest larger helpings. With the following four simple tricks, you can make small but effective changes at home.

Downsize your tableware. Food portions are not the only things that have

grown over the years. Everything that's used to serve food and drinks has grown in size. How do you deal with the upward creep? Choose an 8- to 10-ounce glass rather than a 20-ounce tumbler; a bowl that holds 1-2 cups rather than 4-6. You don't have to get rid of your oversized serving pieces – just bring them out solely for special occasions, such as dinner parties and barbecues, and keep the smaller-size serving dishes and glasses in your cabinets for everyday use.

Put a lid on it. Purchase a few plastic plates that come with storage lids. After you've served yourself your meal on one of them, place the lid on the plate. If you can't close the lid without crushing your food, your serving size is too generous. If you can snap the lid on without effort, you know you're eating a reasonable portion. You don't have to eat off these plates forever – just try the trick a few times to retrain your eye.

Divide and conquer. To eat a balanced meal, draw an imaginary line down the middle of your plate. Fill one half with fruits and veggies. Divide the other half into two parts; fill one part with protein and the other with starch. Note: This trick doesn't work on oversized plates. Use a 9- to 10-inch one.

Follow the rule of one. Avoid serving food "family style." Whatever you're eating, with the exception of vegetables, have only one helping: one chicken breast, one serving of rice, one small slice of cake.

Lose 10 Pounds a Year – Effortlessly!

Did you know you can lose 10 pounds a year by cutting just 100 calories a day? That's a few less bites of dessert or fork twirls of pasta. Instead of consulting calorie charts, try these simple calorie-cutting moves.

- Switch from a 20-ounce soda to a 12-ounce can.
- Eat only half a candy bar or energy bar.
- Use 1 tablespoon of salad dressing instead of 2.
- Choose a 1-ounce pita for your sandwich instead of the 2-ounce size.
- Eat only half your turkey sandwich.
- Order a Tall cappuccino instead of a Grande next time you visit Starbucks, and get nonfat milk.
- Buy prepackaged 1-ounce bags of chips instead of eating from a big bag.
- Use just under a teaspoon of olive oil instead of a tablespoon when sautéing veggies.

Portion Practice

Think about how often you reach into a bag of chips for just a handful and end up absentmindedly gobbling half a huge bag. Do you have any idea how many servings you just ate? Exactly. You need to learn how to "guesstimate."

Food labels for snack foods generally use 1-ounce servings. Weigh an ounce of your favorite snack – say, barbecue potato chips – on a food scale. Then look at it and take into account how much space it takes up. Put it in your cupped hands, getting a feel for its weight and size. Now dump the whole bag into a large serving bowl. Try to grab what you think is an ounce, and then weigh it to see how accurate you are. If you're off, practice until you get it right. Use this technique with any other large packages or tubs of your favorite foods, like pretzels, cookies, crackers, cereal or nuts.



You can eat anything — even dessert — if you watch serving sizes.

Portion Patrol Q & A

Can't say no to a buffet? Tend to pig out when you dine at restaurants? Read on for solutions to portion predicaments.

The Buffet Junkie

Q I know that I should avoid buffets and all-you-can-eat deals, but I love them. Any suggestions?

A Preplan. Before loading food onto your plate, take a stroll up and down the entire buffet line to check out the choices. Note the foods that you would really enjoy and fit them into your plan. Pass on the foods that don't really move you. The good news about a buffet is that often you can get healthy choices. Fill up on fresh veggies, fruits and salads with dressings on the side. Skip calorie-dense foods with lots of sauces and dressings. Take one moderately sized plate and don't go back for more. And remember, eat slowly, savoring each bite. To further help ensure you don't overeat, wear snug-fitting clothes.

The Dinner-Out Diva

Q I am going out to dinner tonight, and I know I'll be eating a lot. What can I snack on this afternoon?

A If you deprive yourself during the day, you'll just end up overeating later. Instead, have a snack in the late afternoon. Then skip the appetizer at the restaurant. A few good late-afternoon snacks are vegetable, minestrone or bean soup; a tossed or spinach salad (go light on the dressing); mixed veggies or pita dipped in hummus; a slice of cheese on whole-wheat toast; fresh fruit and yogurt; or a baked sweet potato with nonfat sour cream. That way, you'll be able to find the self-control to say no to extra-large helpings and oversized desserts.

how to avoid restaurant portion pitfalls

McDonald's may have dumped its Super-Size option, but outrageous serving sizes are still the norm when dining out. Even if you've made your home portion-control headquarters, you need to be aware at restaurants. Here are five restaurant-specific strategies.

Practice a defensive outlook toward oversized food. Don't buy into the consumer culture that pushes too much food on us at every turn. Remember, you don't have to finish your meal when dining at a restaurant. In fact, you *shouldn't* finish it, especially when a portion for one is really enough food to serve two or three.

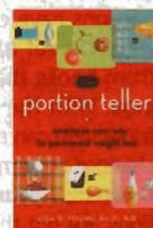
Order a doggie bag before your meal. When your food arrives, eyeball your appropriate portion and ask the wait staff to wrap up the rest before you even begin. Then you won't be tempted to eat more than you should. Just think — if you eat just half of whatever you order, you'll likely be eating the same amount as restaurant-goers did 20 years ago.

Get sauce and side-dish savvy. Always order salad dressing and sauces on the side. That way, you can see exactly how much you're pouring on. For your side-dish options, skip starches entirely, and get double servings of good-for-you green veggies.

Don't measure your dining experience by the size of your portions. Enjoy the experience, including the taste, company and surroundings. Don't inhale your food ... chew it!

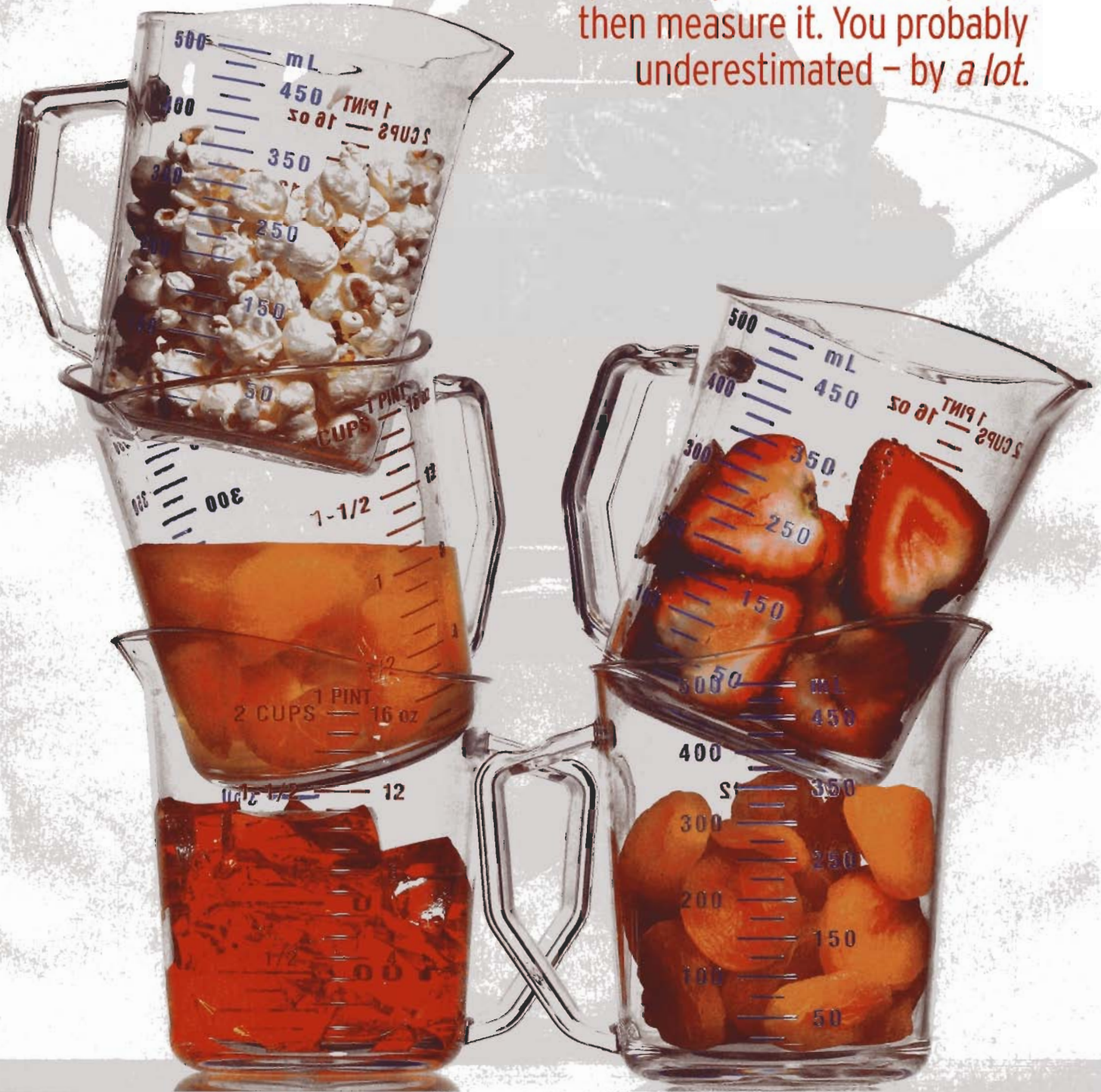
Let fast-food restaurants bring out the kid in you. No matter what label or description a fast-food place attaches to a menu offering, it's probably *still* too large. Just because a restaurant calls its fries or soda "medium" doesn't mean it's an acceptable amount to eat or drink. That's why you should get kiddie or small sizes at all fast-food chains. If it's too difficult for you to go from king to kiddie immediately, go down one portion size at a time.

Excerpted from *The Portion Teller: Smart-size Your Way to Permanent Weight Loss* (Morgan Road Books, 2005) by Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., R.D. © 2005



If you've gained weight, it's not what you've been eating - it's how much.

Test yourself: Guess what size portion you've served up and then measure it. You probably underestimated - by a lot.



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