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## Test Your Portion Size IQ

Do you know what a serving should look like?

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Twenty years ago, a basic meal at a fast-food restaurant consisted of a small burger, a handful or two of fries, and an 8-ounce soft drink. Today, your order may include a double- or triple-patty burger, "supersized" fries, and a 20-ounce soda. Portion sizes at home have increased as well.

Of course, *what* we eat also matters to our health: Large portions of vegetables are not the reason Americans are in an obesity crisis. Experts say that our preferences for calorie-dense foods, as well as our tendency to get too little exercise, also contribute to our expanding waistlines. But out-of-control portions are no doubt a factor.

How does your knowledge of portions stack up? Take this simple quiz and find out:

1. The smallest size coffee you can get at most popular coffeehouses is:
  - a. 6 oz.
  - b. 8 oz.
  - c. 12 oz.
  - d. 16 oz.
2. A typical bagel is equal to how many slices of bread?
  - a. 2
  - b. 3
  - c. 4
  - d. 5
3. Most restaurant entrees contain how many standard servings?
  - a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 2.5
  - d. 3
4. Steaks served at most restaurants are equal to how many normal meat portions?
  - a. 3
  - b. 4
  - c. 6
  - d. 10
5. A normal restaurant portion of baked ziti is equal to:
  - a. 1 cup
  - b. 1.5 cups
  - c. 2 cups
  - d. 3 cups
6. A bakery-style muffin is equal to how many slices of bread?
  - a. 2
  - b. 3
  - c. 4
  - d. 6-8
7. A pint of juice is equal to how many servings of fruit?

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- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4

ANSWERS: 1.C; 2.D; 3.B; 4. B-C; 5. D; 6. D; 7. C

### Keys to Weight Loss

Monitoring portions is one of the simplest ways to lose weight, says Lisa Young, PhD, RD, author of *The Portion Teller*.

"The first step toward reducing calories and losing weight is to become more mindful and aware of the portion sizes of the food you are eating," Young says.

Equally important is choosing less calorie-dense foods, experts say.

"There is no problem eating large portions of fruits or vegetables, but that is not what we do," says Young. "Instead, we eat large portions of everyday foods that are much higher in calories."

### Eating with Your Eyes

We're accustomed to eating a certain amount of food to achieve satisfaction, and when we're served more food, we eat more, experts say.

"In our studies, we found the more food we gave people, the more they ate, regardless of calories," says satiety researcher, Barbara Rolls, PhD, author of *The Volumetrics Weight-Control Plan*. "When we gave study subjects 50% more, they ate 43% more because it is so easy for calorie-dense foods high in fat, such as tuna fish salad and baked ziti, to go down easily."

Her suggestion: Keep your portion sizes the same, but cut calories by lowering the fat in your dishes and adding more low-calorie ingredients like vegetables. Rolls and other researchers at Penn State found that study participants were satisfied with the same-size portion of food even when the calories were reduced by a third. They also found that the participants were less likely to notice a 25% calorie reduction than a 25% reduction in portion size.

"Most people are not immediately sensitive to the amount of calories in a meal, but they are very sensitive to how much they eat," Rolls says.

Indeed, the Penn State researchers found that when study subjects were allowed to eat as much as they wanted of the reduced-calorie foods, they ate 800 fewer calories per meal.

"Adding volume to foods with nutritious ingredients had a significant impact on calorie intake and is a tremendous tool for weight loss," Rolls says.

You can try this at home by making simple modifications to your favorite recipes so you can enjoy larger portions of healthier foods. Pump up the volume of your meals by tossing vegetables, fruits, and beans into casseroles, sauces, soups, salads, stews, and egg dishes. And lower the fat content by reducing added oils and fats, and choosing low-fat or no-fat varieties of ingredients whenever you can.

### Getting Started: Portion Style

So how can you get your own portions under control? Young recommends evaluating your eating style to set yourself up for success.

For example, if you're a member of the clean plate club, keep the serving dishes off the table, use a luncheon-sized plate, and wrap up leftovers immediately to avoid temptation.

If restaurant meals are your downfall, order soup and salad instead of an entrée, and don't forget to move the bread or tortilla chip basket out of reach. If you can resist the temptation to finish your meal, portion off a third to a half and bring it home to enjoy for lunch the next day.

And what if you're partial to buffets?

"Take a lap around the table first to check it out, and then fill up on healthy foods first such as salads, fruits and vegetables," Young advises.

Fill your second plate (not to overflowing) with small portions of the more nutritious foods available. Try not to go back and refill your plate after that. Instead, sit back, drink a glass of water, and assess your hunger.

### Tips for Portion Prowess

Young offers her top 10 tips to help you get portions under control:

1. Leave 1/3 to 1/2 of the portion you're served on your plate. Over time, this can make a huge difference
2. Don't be fooled into thinking that if you skip the bread, you're free to have a larger portion of meat.
3. Cut back wherever you can. Asking for salad dressing on the side, and using one fewer tablespoon of dressing whenever you have salad, can result in a weight loss of up to 10 pounds over a year
4. Make gradual changes in your portions for lasting results. Radical changes don't work, especially with kids
5. You want larger portions? Add more fruits, vegetables, and beans into your meals.
6. A deck of cards is equal to 3 ounces of cooked meat, and a baseball is equal to about a cup. Keep these visual guides in mind to help keep portions reasonable.
7. Don't let deprivation lead to a splurge. If you have a smaller entrée portion, fill up the rest of your plate with vegetables and a green salad.
8. You may be surprised how much cereal, pasta, or rice you are eating. On occasion, measure foods at home so you'll remember what a normal portion looks like.
9. Food labels are educational. Use them to get familiar with the calories and nutrients you're getting with each serving.
10. Don't be lured by value meals. They're good for your wallet, but not your waistline.

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SOURCES: *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 2006; 83:11-7. *Obesity Research*, Vol. 12, No. 3, March 2004. Barbara Rolls, PhD, Guthrie Chair in nutrition, Pennsylvania State University; author, *The Volumetrics Weight-Control Plan*. Lisa Young, PhD, RD, faculty member, New York University; author, *The Portion Teller*.