



Q "Should I rinse chicken before cooking it?"

A Research shows that it's one of the worst things you can do. "Rinsing chicken can splash harmful bacteria onto utensils, the faucet and your kitchen sponge," says Melvin Pascall, Ph.D., associate professor of food science at Ohio State University in Columbus. Instead, unwrap raw chicken over the sink and drain any juices. Then place the packaging in a plastic bag, tie it closed and throw it in the trash. After prepping your poultry, wash your hands and the sink, cutting board and countertop with hot, soapy water. —Samantha Shelton

Q "How can a serving of pasta be just a puny half cup?"

A A serving isn't the same thing as a portion, according to Lisa Young, Ph.D., R.D., a FITNESS advisory board member and author of *The Portion Teller Plan*. Instead, it's the measure that experts use to determine how much we need of each food group. So a half cup of cooked pasta equals one of the six servings of grains we're advised to eat daily. "A portion is the amount you should consume in a single sitting," Young says. "If you're eating pasta as a side dish, a half cup—or around 100 calories' worth—is about right. But as a main dish, one cup is more reasonable."

Q "Is it OK to eat dessert instead of dinner every once in a while?"

A That depends on what *once in a while* means to you. "A piece of cake may have as many calories as a healthy dinner, but it doesn't contain any of the nutrients," says Robin Plotkin, R.D., a dietitian in Dallas. "Substituting a sweet for a meal once a month won't have a big impact on your health, but doing it once a week will." Rather than saving up all your discretionary calories for one over-the-top splurge, Plotkin suggests spreading out smaller treats. "Eating a square or two of dark chocolate or a mini cupcake every other day can keep your cravings from getting out of control," she says.



Food Court

THE VERDICT ON ... GENE-BASED DIETS

You choose a moisturizer based on your skin type, and a swimsuit according to your shape. Why not pick a diet based on your genetic makeup? That's the theory behind a new weight-loss test that claims to tell you whether you'll shed more pounds on a low-carb diet or a low-fat one—that is, after you send in a cheek swab and a check for \$169. But experts are skeptical. "Just because we've identified more than 30 genes that affect metabolism, that doesn't mean we can predict how they'll interact with one another in response to particular foods," says J. Bruce German, Ph.D., professor of food science at the University of California, Davis. "And outside factors, like a poor diet early in life, can also influence how you burn and store calories." Plus, most experts believe that behavior—say, how often you go out to dinner or whether you're an emotional eater—plays a bigger role in weight loss than your DNA does. **Our ruling** You don't need this pricey test to shed pounds.



Got a burning question about food or weight loss? Send us an e-mail at nutrition@fitnessmagazine.com.

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