

Size Matters

Have a lot on your plate? Paring down your portions is the easiest secret to staying slim.

By Amanda Pressner

DOES SQUEEZING INTO YOUR WORKOUT TIGHTS FEEL LIKE A FEAT OF GYMNASTICS?

Before you swear off everything but baby carrots, consider this: The culprit behind weight gain may not be what you're eating, but *how much*. Since the late seventies, we've added 570 calories a day to our diets, and half of them can be attributed to larger portions, according to research at the University of North Carolina. "Even though today's serving sizes can be more than triple what the USDA recommends, they've become our new normal, and anything smaller can seem puny by comparison," says Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., R.D., a FITNESS advisory board member and the author of *The Portion Teller Plan*. Fortunately, having strong visual aids, like the ones on these pages, can go a long way toward helping you shift your mind-set. Once you know what right-size portions look like, selecting them will become second nature. The best part? You can downsize your plate—and your weight—withou giving up the foods you love.



EVEN THE SMALLEST SIZE at most smoothie shops is often double the amount you're supposed to sip. And a large can contain 40 ounces and 1,000-plus calories.

LESSEN PLAN Pass up the juice bar and bring your own recovery drink to the gym. "I like store-bought smoothies, such as Dannon DanActive or Oikos Organic Drinkable Greek Lowfat Yogurt," says Tanya Zuckerbrot, R.D., the author of *The F-Factor Diet*. At home, make your own smoothie by blending three quarters of a cup of lowfat milk with a half cup of frozen fruit and half a banana.

YOU CAN DO IT!

Pasta

Better-for-you size:
1 cup, cooked

Standard size:
3 cups, cooked



Calorie difference:
440

IF THERE'S ONE DISH that always seems to be served in gigantic proportions, it's pasta. Researchers at the Center for Science in the Public Interest found that pasta dinners at some popular chain restaurants contained between three and three and a half cups of noodles, or 840 to 1,040 calories with sauce.

LESSEN PLAN Many restaurants, including Olive Garden and BJ's, offer lunch- or half-size portions. Don't see a smaller serving on the menu? "Ask to be given just one cup of pasta and have the rest boxed up before it's brought to the table," suggests Marge Condasky, R.D., an associate professor at Clemson University. "Special requests are pretty standard nowadays, and most waiters are happy to accommodate them."

Potato Chips

"SNACK SIZES ARE OFTEN TWICE AS BIG as they were 30 years ago," says Michael Jacobson, Ph.D., the executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "And even though the labels on the bags may say they serve two or more, many people polish off the entire contents themselves." One of the most popular snacks, potato chips, may contribute more to long-term weight gain than many other foods or drinks: A study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that for every additional serving of chips a person consumes daily, they gain nearly two pounds every four years.

LESSEN PLAN Choose popped as opposed to fried chips to get more food (about 23 crisps versus 13) for fewer calories. If you prefer the classic version, opt for a one-ounce package or split a bigger bag with a buddy.

Standard size:
2 ounces

Better-for-you size: 1 ounce

Calorie difference:
154



Standard size:
12 ounces, cooked



Better-for-you size:
3 ounces, cooked

Calorie
difference:
572

Steak

WHEN IT COMES TO BEEF, most chefs have had a bigger-is-better mentality: Almost half of those surveyed by researchers at Clemson University and Pennsylvania State University admitted to serving 12-ounce strip steaks—more than double the amount of meat you should eat in a day.

LESSEN PLAN "A lot of chains now offer six-ounce sirloin steaks or filets that cook down to about four and a half ounces and clock in at 350 calories," Young says. Shave 50 to 100 calories off that number by asking the waiter to have yours made with very little or no butter brushed on top.

Ice Cream

"**EATING DIRECTLY OUT OF THE CARTON** means you may well keep going until you hit the cardboard at the bottom," says Brian Wansink, Ph.D., the director of the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University and a FITNESS advisory board member. If you're indulging in premium ice cream, that can be the caloric equivalent of a double cheeseburger, plus a whopping 20 grams of saturated fat—nearly your daily maximum.

LESSEN PLAN Dish out a single serving, and use a small bowl and spoon. A study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found that doing so could shrink your helping of rocky road by about 30 percent. At the ice-cream parlor, get a cup or a cone with a single scoop rather than a sundae or milkshake, which can contain roughly 1,400 to 1,700 calories.



Calorie
difference:
270

YOU CAN DO IT!

White Rice

Standard size:
2 cups, cooked

Better-for-
you size:
1/2 cup, cooked

Calorie difference: 308

ORDER TAKEOUT FROM A CHINESE RESTAURANT and your side of steamed rice will contain 400 to 500 (mostly) empty calories. Not only can it crimp your stay-slim efforts, it can also raise your type 2 diabetes risk: According to researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health, people who ate five or more servings of white rice a week had a 17 percent greater chance of getting the disease than those who ate virtually none.

LESSEN PLAN Switch to brown rice, which contains six times as much fiber as the refined version. And use a measuring cup to get an accurate sense of how much you're really eating, Young advises. When you're dining out, scoop an amount of rice that's half the size of a tennis ball and leave the rest in the serving dish.



Standard size:
6 ounces,
cooked

WE TEND TO THINK OF BONELESS, SKINLESS

CHICKEN breasts as the ultimate diet food, so it's easy to overlook the fact that many are now two and a half times bigger than they used to be. "We assume that whatever comes in the package is the right amount," Young says. "But some four-pound family packs of chicken, which should actually serve 16 people, contain just six breasts."

LESSEN PLAN Look for labels that say "thin-cut" or "thin-sliced." These chicken breasts tend to be sold in four-ounce portions, hitting the USDA-recommended three-ounce mark once they're cooked. Or make your own by splitting the chicken breasts sold in regular packs; simply use a sharp kitchen knife to slice each one in half lengthwise.

Standard size: 4 tablespoons

Calorie
difference:
145

Better-for-you size:
2 tablespoons

Salad Dressing

"**CHEFS ARE NOTORIOUS FOR DROWNING YOUR GREENS** in dressing, which can add 300 to 400 calories and dozens of grams of fat to an otherwise healthy dish," Zuckerbrot says. Even if you order your dressing on the side, a standard restaurant ramekin or to-go pouch of ranch, thousand island or Caesar contains twice the amount you should be putting on your salad.

LESSEN PLAN If your salad feels too dry with just two tablespoons of dressing, ask your server for balsamic vinegar or a lemon wedge you can squeeze over it. "You'll be surprised at how much flavor these minimal-calorie toppers add," Zuckerbrot says.

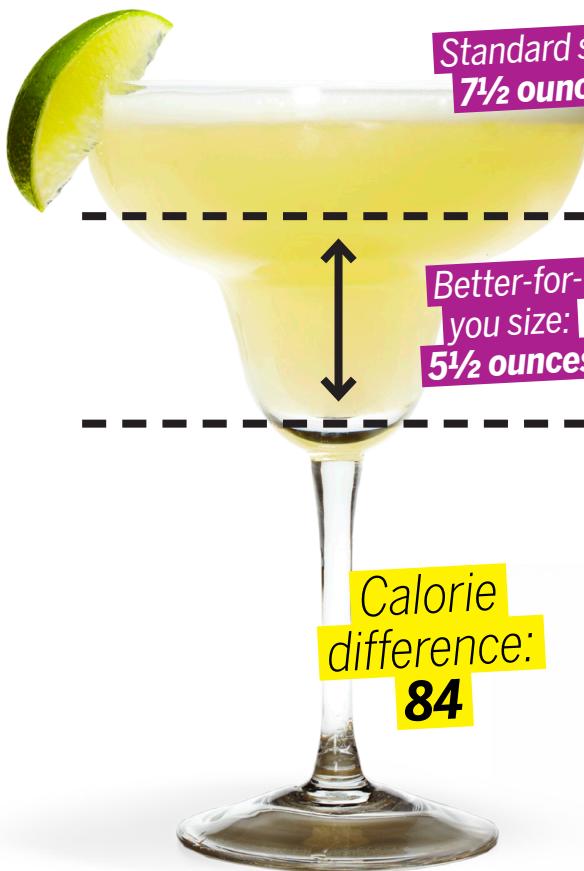
Chicken Breasts



Better-for-
you size:
3 ounces,
cooked

Calorie
difference:
99

YOU CAN DO IT!



Standard size:
7½ ounces

Better-for-
you size:
5½ ounces

84

Calorie
difference:

Margaritas

MIXED DRINKS FREQUENTLY CONTAIN 42 percent more alcohol than a standard one-shot drink would, according to a study in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Review*. "We're likelier to tip well if we're served a generously poured cocktail, and bartenders are banking on that," Zuckerbrot says. "But what you're really getting is a little more alcohol and a lot of sugary, high-calorie mixer, which makes the hard stuff go down so easily that you're ready for another glass sooner."

LESSEN PLAN Switch to beer, wine or liquor on the rocks (with just a splash of juice or club soda), all of which bartenders are less likely to overpour. "By not diluting your alcohol with sugary add-ins that mask the taste, you're more likely to sip it slowly rather than guzzle it," Zuckerbrot says. At home, use a shot glass to ensure you're serving yourself the right amount.

Bagels

WOULD YOU START YOUR DAY with six or seven slices of white bread? "That's the calorie equivalent of a bagel at most chains," says Zuckerbrot. "And that's before it's slathered with cream cheese or butter." Even the average store-bought bagel is about 195 percent bigger than it ought to be, a study in the *American Journal of Public Health* found. Eating the whole thing means you've already put away almost all of your six recommended daily servings of grains.

LESSEN PLAN Both Bruegger's and Au Bon Pain recently began offering Skinny Bagels—with about 200 calories and 90 calories apiece, respectively—and Einstein Bros Bagels now sells Bagel Thin Singles, which come in under 160 calories. At the grocery store, opt for Thomas' 110-calorie Bagel Thins or Weight Watchers Original Bagels, with 150 calories plus 9 grams of filling fiber.



Better-for-you
size: 2½ inches

Standard size:
4½ inches

Calorie
difference:
270