Diet - Serving Sizes

What we call a serving size today is larger than it used to be. A 1950's fast-food burger contained little more than 1 ounce of meat. And a soft drink was 8 ounces (1 cup). Today, a “quarter pounder” burger is at least four times that amount. And a 32 or 64 ounce drink is not uncommon.

A possible guide for eating when trying to lose weight is to eat about half as much as you normally do. Some estimates of serving sizes are:

- 1 dairy - the size of a container of individual yogurt or about 8 ounces.
- 1 grain - 1 slice of bread, or about the size of a CD case.
- ½ cup pasta - the size of an adult woman's palm, stacked 1 inch high.
- 1 meat serving - the size of a deck of cards or about 3 ounces.
- 1 ounce piece of cheese - the size of your thumb.
- 1 fruit - about the size of a tennis ball, or one half cup canned or one medium fruit.
- 1 vegetable - about ½ a baseball or ½ cup of cooked or canned vegetables.
- 1 fat - the size of 4 stacked dimes.

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR CONTROL

- In restaurants, share entrees, or ask the waiter to put half the entrée in a box or bag before you even touch it.
- Order lunch-sized portions. Many restaurants serve 4-6 ounces of meat at lunch, compared with 8-10 ounces at dinner.
- At home, use smaller plates and bowls. It will look as if you are eating more.
- Check food labels for serving size. Eat one serving only.
- Measure label servings to see their sizes. Examples: 2 level tablespoons of peanut butter, ½ cup ice cream.
- Buy smaller packages of candy, popcorn, and snacks.

Experts suggest that people spend a day or two measuring food portions they commonly eat. This will not only give you better practice at estimating serving sizes, but will also indicate whether you are eating an appropriate amount of food to meet your weight goals. If you find that you are eating more than you thought, try measuring out your food for a few days so that you can “reprogram” yourself as to what makes a healthy portion for you.

IN ADDITION, YOU MAY WANT TO FOLLOW THESE TIPS:

- Avoid eating directly out of the bag or carton.
- Plate your food in the kitchen rather than serving it “family style” at the table.
- Wait 20-30 minutes before taking seconds. This is how long it takes your brain to recognize that you are full.
- When eating a meal in a restaurant, determine your proper portion and ask for a box or bag for the rest.
- Split dessert or skip it all together. Have a piece of fruit when you get home.
- While eating half as much, exercise twice as much. Park further away from the mall, take the stairs instead of the escalator, and walk around your block.

Losing weight is a slow, difficult process. It takes long-lasting lifestyle changes. Make gradual changes over time so they become habits. Look to friends and family to support the healthy changes you are making. Avoid fad diets as they are usually only temporary weight loss solutions.

Information complements of USDA and American Dietetic Association.

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