

# WIN

Weight-control Information Network

*Just*  
**Enough**  
**For You**

**About Food Portions**



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
National Institutes of Health



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# Introduction

**C**ontrolling your weight calls for more than just choosing a healthy variety of foods. It also calls for looking at **how much** and **how often** you eat. This brochure shows you how to use serving sizes to help you eat just enough for you.



# What is the difference between a portion and a serving?

A “portion” is how much food you choose to eat at one time, whether in a restaurant, from a package, or in your own kitchen. A “serving” size is the amount of food listed on a product’s Nutrition Facts. Sometimes, the portion size and serving size match; sometimes they do not. Keep in mind that the serving size on the Nutrition Facts is not a recommended amount of food to eat. It is a quick way of letting you know the calories and nutrients in a certain amount of food.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Nutrition Facts information is printed on most packaged foods. It tells you how many calories and how much fat, carbohydrate, sodium, and other nutrients are available in one serving of food. Most packaged foods contain more than a single serving. The serving sizes that appear on food labels are based on FDA-established lists of foods. (For more information, see <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov>)



# How do I know how big my portions are?



The portion size that you are used to eating may be equal to two or three standard servings. Take a look at the Nutrition Facts for macaroni and cheese. The serving size is 1 cup, but the package actually has 2 cups of this food product. If you eat the entire package, you are

eating two servings of macaroni and cheese—and double the calories, fat, and other nutrients in a standard serving.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>			
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)			
Servings Per Container 2			
Amount Per Serving			
<b>Calories</b> 250	Calories from Fat 110		
% Daily Value*			
<b>Total Fat</b> 12g	<b>18%</b>		
Saturated Fat 3g	<b>15%</b>		
Trans Fat 3g			
<b>Cholesterol</b> 30mg	<b>10%</b>		
<b>Sodium</b> 470mg	<b>20%</b>		
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 31g	<b>10%</b>		
Dietary Fiber 0g	<b>0%</b>		
Sugars 5g			
<b>Protein</b> 5g			
Vitamin A 4%	● Vitamin C 2%		
Calcium 20%	● Iron 4%		
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:			
	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

## Nutrition Facts

To see how many servings a package has, check the “servings per container” listed on its Nutrition Facts. You may be surprised to find that small containers often have more than one serving inside.

Learning to recognize standard serving sizes can help you judge how much you are eating.

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When cooking at home, look at the serving sizes listed on the Nutrition Facts for the packaged food products you eat. Use measuring cups and spoons to put the suggested serving size on your plate before you start eating. This will help you see what one standard serving of that food looks like compared to how much you normally eat.

It may also help to compare serving sizes to everyday objects. For example, 1/4 cup of raisins is about the size of a large egg. Three ounces of meat or poultry is about the size of a deck of cards. See other serving size comparisons below. (Keep in mind that these size comparisons are approximations.)

## Serving Sizes

1 cup of cereal = a fist

1/2 cup of cooked rice, pasta, or  
potato = 1/2 baseball

1 baked potato = a fist

## Everyday Objects



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## Serving Sizes

1 medium fruit = a baseball

1/2 cup of fresh fruit = 1/2 baseball

1 1/2 ounces of low-fat or fat-free  
cheese = 4 stacked dice

1/2 cup of ice cream = 1/2 baseball

2 tablespoons of peanut butter  
= a ping-pong ball

## Everyday Objects



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**A** Another way to keep track of your portions is to use a food diary. Keeping track of when, what, how much, where, and why you eat can help you be aware of the amount of food you are eating and the times you tend to eat too much. A food diary can be kept in a notebook, on your cell phone, or online. For instance, you can track your nutritional and physical activity status using the MyPyramid Tracker (see the “Additional Reading” section). Page 7 shows what 1 day of a person’s food diary might look like.



After reading the food diary on page 7, you can see that this person chose relatively healthy portion sizes for breakfast and lunch. At those meals, she ate to satisfy her hunger. She had a large chocolate bar in the afternoon for an emotional reason—she ate because she was bored, not because she was hungry. **If you tend to eat when you are not hungry, try doing something else, like taking a break to walk around the block or calling a friend, instead of eating. You could**

**also try doing something with your hands, such as knitting, drawing, or playing cards. If the craving hits you while you are at work, try drinking water or herbal tea without sugar.**

By 8 p.m., this person was very hungry and ate large portions of higher-fat, higher-calorie foods. She was at a social event and did not realize she was eating more than necessary. If she had made an early evening snack of fruit and fat-free or low-fat yogurt, she might have been less hungry at 8 p.m. and eaten less. **Through your diary, you can become aware of the times and reasons you eat too much, which can help as you try to make different choices in the future.**

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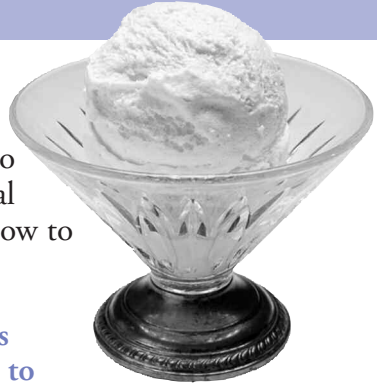
# Thursday

Time	Food	Amount	Place	Hunger/ Reason	Calories*
8 a.m.	Coffee, black Banana Low-fat yogurt	6 fl. oz. 1 medium 1 cup	Home	Slightly hungry	7 105 205
1 p.m.	Turkey and cheese sandwich on whole-wheat bread with mustard, tomato, low-fat cheese and lettuce  Potato chips, baked  Water	3 oz. turkey, 1 slice American cheese, 2 slices bread  1 small bag  16 fl. oz.	Work	Hungry	373  108 –
3 p.m.	Chocolate bar	King Size (4 oz.)	Work	Not hungry/ Bored	560
8 p.m.	Fried potato skins with cheese and bacon  Chicken Caesar salad  Breadsticks  Apple pie with vanilla ice cream  Soft drink	4 each  2 cups lettuce, 6 oz. chicken, 6 Tbsp. dressing, 3/4 cup croutons  2 large sticks  1/8 of 9-inch pie, 1 cup ice cream  12 fl. oz.	Restaurant/ Out with friends	Very hungry	333  855  296  623  155

\*Approximations based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "My Pyramid Tracker," an online dietary and physical activity assessment tool (<http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov/default.htm>).

# How can I control portions at home?

You do not need to measure and count everything you eat for the rest of your life—just do this long enough to recognize typical serving sizes. Try the ideas listed below to help you control portions at home.



- **Take the amount of food that is equal to one serving, according to the Nutrition Facts,** and eat it off a plate instead of eating straight out of a large box or bag.



- **Avoid eating in front of the TV or while busy with other activities.** Pay attention to what you are eating, chew your food well, and fully enjoy the smell and taste of your foods.
- **Eat slowly** so your brain can get the message that your stomach is full.

- **Try using smaller dishes, bowls, and glasses.** This way, when you fill up your plate or glass, you will be eating and drinking less.



- **To control your intake of the higher-fat, higher-calorie parts of a meal**, take seconds of vegetables and salads (watch the toppings) instead of desserts and dishes with heavy sauces.
- **When cooking in large batches, freeze food that you will not serve right away.** This way, you will not be tempted to finish eating the whole batch before the food goes bad. And you will have ready-made food for another day. Freeze leftovers in amounts that you can use for a single serving or for a family meal another day.
- **Try to eat meals at regular intervals.** Skipping meals or leaving large gaps of time between meals may lead you to eat larger amounts of food the next time that you eat.
- **When buying snacks**, go for single-serving prepackaged items and foods that are lower-calorie options. If you buy larger bags or boxes of snacks, divide the items into single-serve packages.
- **Make snacks count.** Eating many high-calorie snacks throughout the day may lead to weight gain. Replace snacks like chips and soda with snacks such as low-fat or fat-free yogurt, smoothies, fruit, or whole-grain crackers.
- **When you do have a treat** like chips or ice cream, measure out 1/2 cup of ice cream or 1 ounce of chips, as indicated by the Nutrition Facts, eat it slowly, and enjoy it!



# Is getting more food for your money always a good value?

Have you noticed that it only costs a few cents more to get larger sizes of fries or soft drinks at restaurants? Getting a larger portion of food for just a little extra money may seem like a good value, but you end up with more food and calories than you need.



Before you buy your next “value combo,” be sure you are making the best choice for your wallet and your health. If you are with someone else, share the large-size meal. If you are eating alone, skip the special deal and just order what you need.

# How can I control portions when eating out?

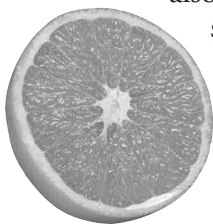
**R**esearch shows that the more often a person eats out, the more body fat he or she has. Try to prepare more meals at home. Eat out and get take-out foods less often. When you do eat away from home, try these tips to help you control portions:

- **Share your meal**, order a half-portion, or order an appetizer as a main meal. Examples of healthier appetizers include tuna or chicken salad, minestrone soup, and tomato or corn salsas.
- **Take at least half of your meal home.** Ask for a portion of your meal to be boxed up when it is served so you will not be tempted to eat more than you need.
- **Stop eating when you begin to feel full.** Focus on enjoying the setting and your friends or family for the rest of the meal.



- **Avoid large beverages such as “supersize” sugar-sweetened soft drinks.** They have a large number of calories. Instead, try drinking water with a slice of lemon. If you want to drink soda, choose a calorie-free beverage or a small sugar-sweetened soft drink.

- **When traveling,** pack a small cooler of foods that are hard to find on the road, such as fresh fruit, sliced raw vegetables, and fat-free or low-fat yogurt. Also, pack a few bottles of water instead of sugar-sweetened soda or juice. You can also bring dried fruit, nuts, and



seeds to snack on. Since these foods can be high in calories, measure and pack small portions (1/4 cup) in advance. If you stop at a restaurant, try to choose one that serves a variety of foods such as salads, grilled or steamed entrees, or a plain baked potato. Consider drinking water or low-fat or fat-free milk instead of sugar-sweetened soft drinks with your meal. If you choose a higher-fat option like french fries or pizza, order the small size, or ask for a single slice of pizza with vegetable toppings such as mushrooms, peppers, or olives.

# How can I control portions when money is tight?

**E**ating well does not have to cost a lot of money. Here are some ways you can keep track of your portions without adding extra costs to your grocery bill.

- **Buy meats in bulk.** When you get home, divide the meats into single-serving packages and freeze for later use.
- **Buy fruits and vegetables when they are in season.** Buy only as much as you will use, so they will not go bad. Check out your local farmers market, as it may be less expensive than a grocery store.
- **Watch your portion sizes.** Try to stick to the serving sizes listed on the Nutrition Facts label of prepackaged foods. Doing so can help you get the most out of the money you spend on that food. In addition, you can better control the fat and calories you eat.

## Remember...

The amount of calories you eat affects your weight and health. In addition to selecting a healthy variety of foods, look at the size of the portions you eat. Choosing nutritious foods and keeping portion sizes sensible may help you reach and stay at a healthy weight.



## Additional Reading

*Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). January 2005. Available at <http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines>.

*Finding Your Way to a Healthier You: Based on the “Dietary Guidelines for Americans.”* DHHS and USDA. 2005. Available at <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/pdf/brochure.pdf>.

*Guidance on How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Panel on Food Labels*. U.S. Food and Drug Administration Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. November 2004. Available at <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html>.

*MyPyramid Food Guidance System*. USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. <http://www.mypyramid.gov>.

*MyPyramid Tracker and MyPyramid Menu Planner*. The Tracker is an online dietary and physical activity assessment tool that provides information on an individual’s diet quality, physical activity status, related nutrition messages, and links to nutrition and physical activity information. The Planner helps individuals prepare healthier menus based on the recommendations of the MyPyramid Food Guidance System and the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Available at <http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov> and <http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov/planner>, respectively.

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*Portion Distortion II Interactive Quiz.* National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. <http://hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/portion/index.htm>. 2004.

*Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.* DHHS. October 2008. Available at <http://www.health.gov/PAGuidelines>.

## Weight-control Information Network Brochures

*Active at Any Size.* April 2004.

*Better Health and You: Tips for Adults.* Part of the series *Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan.* June 2004.

*Walking! A Step in the Right Direction.* August 2004.  
Available in English and Spanish.

To request a free brochure, call the Weight-control Information Network at 1-877-946-4627 or log onto <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov>.

## Weight-control Information Network

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The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a national information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health, which is the Federal Government's lead agency responsible for biomedical research on nutrition and obesity. Authorized by Congress (Public Law 103–43), WIN provides the general public, health professionals, the media, and Congress with up-to-date, science-based health information on weight control, obesity, physical activity, and related nutritional issues.

Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This publication was also reviewed by Samuel Klein, M.D., Danforth Professor of Medicine; Director, Center for Human Nutrition; Chief, Division of Geriatrics and Nutritional Science; Director, Center for Applied Research Sciences; Director, Weight Management Program, Washington University; and Marie-Pierre St-Onge, Ph.D., Research Associate, St. Luke's Roosevelt Hospital Center.

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