



Nutritionists Warn Public: Portion Sizes Out of Control

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Nutrition experts with the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) are calling for Americans to take a day to measure the serving sizes of their favorite foods. Taking time to "eyeball" individual serving amounts will help reveal a gap between the servings listed on food labels and the helpings Americans actually consume. "Portion sizes are getting bigger, and Americans are getting fatter," said AICR Director of Nutrition Education, Melanie Polk, R.D. "The two trends are related. Over the past few decades the amount of food we consume has steadily increased."

According to clinical studies, Americans underestimate the amount of calories they consume each day by as much as 25%. Such "unconscious eating" helps to explain why more Americans than ever – 61% – are now considered overweight. This means most Americans are now at increased risk for obesity-related diseases like cancer, coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, gallbladder disease, and osteoarthritis.

"Eyeball" Your Portions

For a single day, consumers are urged to follow these quick, simple steps at each meal. First, check the serving size listed on the "Nutrition Facts" food label, and fill a measuring spoon or cup with that amount. Next, empty the food onto a clean plate. At this point, consumers should make a mental snapshot of what they see. By repeating this procedure at each meal prepared that

day, consumers will quickly learn what a single serving of many different foods really looks like. The mental snapshots taken while "eyeballing" single servings are invaluable for gauging portion size in the future. "More people are reading food labels today, and that's encouraging," said Polk. "But without knowing how big a serving size really is, the nutritional information listed on labels can't be put into context, and is not particularly useful. For example, a typical serving of low-fat granola contains 220 calories and 3 grams of fat. What most people don't notice, however, is that the serving size is only 2/3 of a cup. So if they pour themselves a typical bowl of cereal, they could be getting two, three, even four times more calories and fat than they realize."

Even so, nutritionists stress that the serving size amounts on food labels are not to be considered suggested servings. They are simply the units of measure used by food manufacturers to derive nutritional information like calories, fat, cholesterol, carbohydrate, protein, vitamins and minerals. "Of course, different people have different caloric needs, and it may well be that they require more than one 'serving' of a given food at a meal," said Polk. "After using the 'eyeball method,' however, they'll be fully aware of what they are doing and that's important."

Portion Sizes Continue to Grow

Changes in the American marketplace have spurred the growth in portion size. Fast food chains have inflated their serving sizes. Modestly sized bagels and muffins have disappeared, replaced by creations three or four times their size. Even reputable restaurants are using larger plates laden with more food to assure customers they're getting their money's worth. "These are some of the factors that have contributed to the problem," said Polk. "But what's really happening here is that, as a nation, we've forgotten when to say when. The serving size is a fundamental concept of everyday nutrition, and we've slowly let ourselves lose sight of it."

If your portions, and weight, have been slowly increasing, take the initiative. *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*[™] can provide additional practical strategies to prevent weight gain. Your local base Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) and Dietitian provides guidance on modifying your portion size to stay fit and healthy. Call them today!