



Value Marketing Is Making America Fat, Research Institute Says
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The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) is asking Americans to buck a food industry trend that is contributing to the nation's obesity epidemic. "Value marketing" appeals to the consumer's desire for bargains by offering more product for less money. AICR Director of Nutrition Education Melanie Polk, RD, said that this marketing strategy is having a measurable and unfortunate long-term effect on national health. As "family-sized" packaging began appearing in supermarket aisles, "supersizes," "value meals," and other oversized portions became commonplace in the nation's eating establishments. This practice by food manufacturers, food retailers and restaurants comes with certain health risks. "Americans have to keep in mind that getting more food for less money has a downside," Polk said. "It simply shifts the pressure from our wallets to our waistbands." Today, more Americans than ever – 61 % – are considered to be overweight. This means most American's are at increased risk for obesity-related diseases like certain cancers, coronary heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and osteoarthritis.

Food Industry Makes the Case for Value Marketing When it comes to bigger portions, representatives of the food industry say they are only responding to consumer demand, not creating it. Dr. Stanton, an industry consultant, cited consumer surveys in which respondents consistently rate "value" as one of the most important considerations when buying food at home or in restaurants. From an industry perspective, Stanton said, it comes down to simple economics – the cheapest way to give customers extra value is to increase portion sizes. The problem, is that Americans are eating all that extra food. US Department of Agriculture statistics

show that American total daily caloric intake has risen from 1,854 kcal to 2,002 kcal over the last 20 years. Thus, as food profits increase, so do the numbers on the nation's bathroom scales.

AICR Offers Practical Advice to Combat Value Marketing "Value marketing has confused Americans about what a normal and appropriate portion of food should look like," said Polk. One way to regain perspective on portions is to spend a few minutes with a measuring cup. By simply "eyeballing" the USDA standardized serving sizes of some favorite foods, people can easily develop an important and empowering sense of appropriate portions. Armed with this knowledge, a person can gradually make appropriate adjustments in mealtime portion sizes.

Advice for Dining Out Studies are showing more Americans are eating out than ever before. Therefore, in order to deal with large food portions "say small, say half, and share," said Polk. "If you're given the option, order the small. It may not seem cost-effective, but it's enough food to satisfy most people. In the long run, the calories you save will more than make up for the extra pennies you spend. At table-service restaurants, ask the server to put half of your entrée in a doggie bag before bringing it to your table. This strategy, is very cost-effective, it provides two full meals for the price of one." Finally, Polk said, sharing entrees and desserts (if ordered) is a fun and economical way to keep both cost and calories down.

Demand Less for Less Polk predicts that things aren't going to get any better for weight-conscious Americans anytime soon. "The only way to inject a little sanity back into the discussion is for consumers to stand up and demand it. Tell them you don't want more for less. Tell them you want less for less -- *less food for even less money*. You want to sit down and enjoy an amount of food that you can finish without feeling stuffed, at a fair and reasonable price."

For more information on reducing the effect of value marketing on your waistline, contact your local base Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian.

Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!™