



**Amid Obesity Epidemic, More Americans Than Ever Are Cleaning Their Plates,  
New Surveys Find**

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A new report released by the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) shows that more Americans than ever are eagerly polishing off whatever amount of food is in front of them. The new data also seem to confirm something health experts have feared: Americans have lost sight of the basic relationship between the portions they eat and the weight they carry, and focus too exclusively on cutting out specific types of food such as carbohydrates or fats.

According to the new AICR report, 69 percent of Americans now say that when dining out at table service restaurants, they finish their entrees **most of the time** or **all of the time**, up 2 percent from 2000. The number of women who say they finish their entrees **every time** they eat out has doubled, from 9 percent to 18 percent.

Figures from the report, called "Awareness and Action: AICR Surveys on Portion Size, Nutrition and Cancer Risk," indicate that Americans have even adopted this passive approach to portions at home. Fully 30 percent of Americans now say they generally base the amount of food they eat on the **amount they are served**, up 4 percent from previous surveys. Nearly half – 42 percent – say they base the amount of food they eat on the **amount they are used to eating**, up 8 percent from 2000 figures.

These findings are particularly troubling in light of recent scientific studies cited in the AICR report, which show that individuals can and do unconsciously consume more calories – as much as 56 percent more – when served larger portions.

AICR Vice President Jeff Prince referred to a set of figures from the new AICR report, which show that 78 percent of Americans still believe the specific **kind of food** they eat is more important for losing weight than the sheer **amount of food** they eat. Evidently, a spate of recent health messages about “portion distortion” have gone unheeded – the tendency to ignore the importance of total calorie intake is just as strong as it was three years ago.

In one of the surveys, AICR asked Americans to estimate the standard USDA serving sizes for common foods like green beans, nuts, mashed potatoes and cereal. Out of eight questions, well over half of respondents (61 percent) missed four or more – a failing grade. Fully 7 percent were only able to answer one question correctly.

Prince was quick to add that USDA standard serving sizes are a unit of measure, not a recommended amount of food. He maintained, however, that Americans’ fundamental lack of familiarity with such a basic nutritional concept is symptomatic of a large and potentially dangerous problem.

But there is also cause for hope in the AICR report. According to the surveys, awareness of the importance of portion size has increased slightly – but only among men. The number of men who say the amount of food is more important for weight management has jumped 8 points – from 14 percent to 22 percent – in three years. (Women, however, are 4 percent less likely to look to total calorie intake.)

If your weight has been increasing, take the initiative. *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*<sup>™</sup> can provide additional practical strategies to prevent weight gain. Your local Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian can provide guidance on modifying your portion size to stay fit and healthy. Call them today!