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Mastering Food Portion Control

In the past decade, the number of overweight adults in the United States has increased from one in four to one in two. While lack of exercise is a big part of the problem, nutritionists believe that another major culprit is poor portion control. A “megameal” mentality has taken hold in restaurants, fast-food spots, convenience stores and even many homes.

“Most people don’t realize that consuming as few as 100 extra calories per day—the amount found in 10 French fries or an ounce of cheese—can add up to a 10-pound weight gain in a year,” says nutritionist and group fitness instructor Catherine Reade, MS, RD, of Healthfull Living nutrition consulting in

Littleton, Colorado. “So portion sizes obviously do matter.”

Being obsessed with calorie counting is not a wholesome way to look at food, but learning to eat in moderation is crucial to good health and successful weight management. Reade offers this handy guide (based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Guide Pyramid) to help you master portion control. The guide gives visual cues for single servings and lists each serving’s caloric content. You can see that regulating portion size is especially important when it comes to higher-fat foods like meat, full-fat dairy and oils. Use this convenient guide to learn (and remember!) what constitutes appropriate portion size.

single serving visual cues and caloric content

| Food Group | # Daily Servings | Single Serving | Visual Cue | Calories per Serving (approx.) |
|---|-------------------|---|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Grains (bread, cereal, rice & pasta) | 6-11 | 1 slice of bread | CD case | 80 |
| | | 1 cup cold cereal | baseball | 80 |
| | | 1/2 cup cooked cereal | English muffin | 80 |
| | | 1/2 cup rice or pasta | scoop of ice cream | 80 |
| Vegetables | 3-5 | 1 cup raw, leafy veggies | salad bowl | 25 |
| | | 1/2 cup cooked veggies | computer mouse | 25 |
| | | 3/4 cup vegetable juice | standard lightbulb | 30 |
| Fruits | 2-4 | 15 grapes | tennis ball | 60 |
| | | 1/2 cup canned fruit | computer mouse | 60 |
| | | 3/4 cup fruit juice | standard lightbulb | 90 |
| Dairy (milk, yogurt & cheese) | 2-3 | 1 cup milk | standard yogurt cup | nonfat: 90; 2% fat: 120 |
| | | 1 1/2 ounces (oz) nonprocessed cheese | computer disk | whole: 150 |
| | | 1/2 cup frozen yogurt | computer mouse | 100 |
| Meat, Fish, Poultry, Eggs, Beans & Nuts | 2-3 | 3 oz cooked lean meat | deck of cards | 110-165 |
| | | 3 oz skinless chicken breast | cassette tape | 165 |
| | | 3 oz salmon fillet | deck of cards | 165 |
| Fat, Oils & Sweets | Use sparingly. | 1 teaspoon oil, salad dressing or mayonnaise | matchbook | 45 |

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture. 1992. The Food Guide Pyramid. Home and Garden Bulletin #252. Mahan, L. K., & M. Arlin. 1992. Food, Nutrition and Diet Therapy, 8th edition. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders.

