

EXTENSION CONNECTION – Portion Sizes

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Q. Do portion sizes influence how much we eat?

- A.** Portion size is one of the areas that seem to be important in the rising prevalence of overweight and obesity in the U.S. Obesity is a key risk factor for the development of many chronic diseases including heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Analysis of food intake from 1977 until 1996 indicates that portion sizes have increased, especially for fast-food meals and food eaten inside the home for individuals 2 years of age and older.

Research has shown that when people are served larger portions, larger amounts are eaten. This has been demonstrated both for children and adults. One study found that 3 year olds were more resistant to eating larger portions (when served larger amounts) than 5 year olds. So learning to eat large amounts seems to be a learned response to the environmental stimulus of large portion sizes. Larger portions result in a greater calorie intake. Unless matched by increased physical activity, the extra calories will result in weight gain.

Q. What can I do to control portion sizes?

- A.** Plan and prepare meals at home and offer one or two vegetables and a fruit serving with each noon and evening meal. Fruits and vegetables are relatively low in calories and the portion size is not as important to help control overall caloric intake.

Plant and grow a family garden.

Have children be involved in all aspects of selection and preparation of food to help learn skills needed to ensure healthy eating for a lifetime.

Serve only milk or water with meals. Limit commercially sweetened beverages including soda pop, sports drinks, and fruit drinks (as opposed to fruit juice) for occasional use only. Serve 100 percent juice once per day.

Serve appropriate size portions for the age and activity level of each family member.

Limit the frequency and availability of foods providing primarily calories with few other nutrients such as prepackaged sweet and salty snacks. Read nutrition labels to determine the calories/portion.

At fast food restaurants, ask for a nutrition brochure of the products served. Make informed decisions. Select smaller size sandwiches or entrees and beverages. The “value meal” may be a saving to your wallet but not to your waistline or your health.

Carry along fruit or cut-up raw vegetables to help add nutrients and satiety to fast-food meals. *Information provided by North Dakota State University Extension Services.*