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Portion Size vs. Serving Size: What's the Difference?

By Ann Zander, CSU Extension of Boulder County

A **portion** is the amount of food that you choose to eat for a meal or snack. There is no standard portion size and no single right or wrong portion size. It can be big or small – you decide!

A **serving** is a standard measured amount used to help give advice about how much to eat, or to identify how many calories and nutrients are in a food. Examples: 1 slice of bread, a 6-inch tortilla, or 8-oz./1 cup of milk.

Many foods that come as a single **portion** actually contain more than one **serving**. The Nutrition Facts Label on packaged foods tells you the number of **servings** in the container. For example a 3-ounce bag of chips---which many would consider is a single **portion**---really contains 3 **servings**.

Anyone eating on the run or at restaurants has noticed that food **portions** have gotten larger. It is hard to find “small” anymore, as **portions** seem to be “super sized.” Some **portions** have simply grown so much in size that they can provide enough **servings** for at least 2 adults. These growing **portion** sizes are changing what adults and children think of as a “normal” **portion** at home, too. This is called “**portion distortion**.”

Larger **portions** can lead to more food being eaten. With this **portion distortion** of what is in a **serving** comes an increase in waistlines and body weight for the whole family. Learn when **portions** are larger than needed. Teach your child to eat the recommended daily number of **servings** for their age group. The more you know about serving sizes, the more you will be able to help your child learn to serve themselves a healthy amount of food.....a **healthy portion!**

Source: US Department of Health & Human Services

20 Years Ago



270 calories,
5 cups

Today



630 calories,
11 cups

Before you start looking at your family's portion sizes, lets find out what healthy portion sizes look like: A Visual Guide for Adult Serving Sizes



1 fruit serving= ½ cup canned or 1 medium fruit (about the size of a tennis ball)



1 meat, poultry or fish serving= 3 oz (about the size of a deck of cards)



1 grain= 1 slice bread, pre-sliced (about the size of a cassette tape) or 1/2 cup pasta (about the size of an woman's palm, stacked 1" high)



1 dairy serving=8 ounces (the size of a container of individual yogurt)



1 vegetable serving = 1/2 cup cooked or canned vegetables (about ½ a baseball)



1 fat serving= 1 teaspoon (about the size of 4 stacked dimes)



Handful = 1-2 oz.
Example: 1 oz.nuts = 1 handful



Fist = 1 cup
Example: 2 servings of pasta or oatmeal



Palm = 3 oz.
Example: a cooked hamburger



Thumb = 1 oz. Example: piece of cheese

**How do your portions translate into healthy servings? Let's take a look and find out!
A Guide to Daily Serving Sizes for Children Who Play for 30 Minutes**

**Toddler
Serving Sizes:**

A toddler serving sizes should equal about 1/4 of an adult serving size.

**Preschoolers
and Young
School-Aged
Serving Sizes:**

A serving size for your child (4-8 years) should be about 1/3 of an adult serving size.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

Food Groups	Ages 2-3 Years	Ages 4-6 Years	Ages 7-12 Years
Milk	2 cups	2 cups	3 cups
Fruits			
• 100 % juice, fresh, frozen, canned, or dried	1 cup	1 to 1 ½ cups	1 ½ cups
Grains/Bread			
• Bread/Tortilla	3 ounces	4 to 5 ounces	5 ounces
• Cornbread, biscuit, roll or muffin			
• Cold dry cereal			
• Hot cooked cereal, pasta or rice			
Meat/Beans			
• Meat, poultry, fish, tofu, or cheese	2 ounces	3 to 4 ounces	5 ounces
• Eggs			
• Cooked dry beans or peas			
• Peanut butter			
• Nuts or seeds			
• Yogurt			
Vegetables			
• Fresh, frozen, canned, or dried.	1 cup	1 ½ cups	2 to 2 ½ cups

Source: MyPyramid

Tips for Success:

- Use a smaller plate to avoid portion distortion. A portion of food on an 8" plate seems more satisfying than the same amount on a 12" plate.
- Offer single servings of the main course or snacks that you prepare at home, and let your kids have extra salad or vegetables if they are still hungry.
- Buy single servings or bite-size snacks. Better yet and to save money bag your own single serving snacks ahead of time.
- Check the label and repackage foods into single serving sizes. If a bag of cookies says that a single serving is 3 cookies, then serve 3 cookies to your child.
- Avoid letting your kids just eat from a bag of snacks or carton of ice cream, since they will likely eat much more than one serving
- If your child is still hungry, you can always give seconds, like another ½ serving of vegetables or fruits. The important limits are not to overdo it on milk or juice, so that your child isn't hungry for the meal or snack.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics Guide to Your Child's Nutrition

Let's Talk:

- If children ask why you are measuring foods, say "I want to be sure we are all getting enough healthy foods each day and I won't know that until I measure it for a few days. Do you want to help?" Make measuring food a fun activity you do together. It can become an opportunity to teach math skills.
- The power of role models in a child's life is vital

There are 3 adults teach children.....Albert Schwitzer

1. *by example*
2. *by example*
3. *by example*

Activity & Recipe for Health:

Read "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle and explain how the caterpillar changes into a beautiful butterfly.

A Caterpillar Snack

- Have everyone wash their hands before making their snack.



Ingredients for One Caterpillar:

- ½ to 1 lettuce leaf
- 3 – 4 round snack crackers
- whipped cream cheese
- 2 raisins
- 2 chow mein noodles

*optional food coloring for cream cheese

Directions:

1. Tear up a lettuce and sprinkle the pieces on a plate
2. Spread whipped cream cheese on the crackers. Lay the crackers, cream cheese side up on the plate, slightly overlapping one another. *Add food coloring to the cream cheese if desired.
3. Add raisin eyes.
4. Add 2 chow mein noodles for feelers.

Be a Role Model and show "by example" by trying a new food and tasting the Caterpillar snack in front of your kids.

Source: Nutrition Explorations/Chef Combo