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A tall stack of Oreo cookies, with one cookie standing upright on top. The stack is placed on a blue cloth. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

# downsize your dinner plate

Our girth is growing as supersize snacks and meals become the norm. Want a simple solution? Pick the right plates, bowls, cups—and portions—and your weight will decrease.

By Madhu Gadia, M.S., R.D.  
Photos by Scott Little  
Food styling by Greg Luna



A young child with short dark hair, wearing a green t-shirt, is holding a large, round, golden-brown cookie with both hands. The cookie is studded with colorful M&M's candies and chocolate chips. The child is looking up and to the left with a happy expression. The background is a solid blue color. The child is sitting at a wooden table, and a small crumb is visible on the surface.

Today a  
two-fisted  
(4-inch) cookie  
is the norm.  
**In calories it  
equals six  
Oreos.**



# 1960

## HOMEMADE SANDWICH:

2 slices of bread +  
1 slice of  
bologna



380 calories

Most of us are aware that restaurants and food manufacturers have adopted the bad habit of supersizing meals, drinks, and snacks. What may surprise you is this: We're doing the same thing at our dinner tables. Food packages, dishware, and even recipes have evolved to encourage us to eat more than we need. And it turns out that we are not good at pushing the extra portions away: Studies show that the more food we're given, the more we eat.

Most of us need a quick course in portion sizes, says Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., R.D., nutrition consultant at New York University. She is alarmed at the portion distortion that has occurred in this country in the past few decades. "Everything we eat today is bigger—bagels, muffins, sodas, burgers,

you name it. They're often two to five times larger," Young says. "The sizes of our mugs, glasses, bowls, and plates have increased. So we pile more calories into those dishes."

It is challenging to find appropriately sized dishes: a 6-ounce juice glass; 8-ounce milk glass, a 9-inch dinner plate, or a 4-ounce bowl. Rather than those standard sizes, we are more likely to have cupboards full of 11-inch plates, 11- to 24-ounce glasses, and 8- to 20-ounce bowls. A mug of coffee might hold 16 to 24 ounces today. Drink two mugs daily and you are downing the equivalent of four to six cups of coffee.

Since 1960, the size of a typical American family has decreased, yet the magnitude of our meals has grown. Spacious kitchens, walk-in pantries, and commercial-size refrigerators have become commonplace. Recipes also are providing directions for making larger servings, says Young, who has written a book on the topic, *The Portion Teller* (Morgan Road Books; 2005). She compared identical recipes in different editions of *Joy of Cooking* (Scribner) and discovered that the current recipes make fewer portions. "For example, the same brownie recipe using

While what we eat is important, knowing how much to eat is critical to controlling our calorie intake and weight.





# 2006

HOMEMADE  
SANDWICH:  
2 slices of hearty  
bread + 10 slices  
of turkey

820 calories

identical ingredients yielded 30 brownies in the 1970s and 16 brownies now. Each brownie is now twice as big."

## Growing trend

How did today's oversize portions and appetites become the norm? It didn't

happen by accident or by some inevitable evolutionary process. Portions started increasing sometime in the early 1970s as manufacturers and fast-food restaurants began feeding consumers hungry for bonuses and bargains. Because the shift was gradual, most people didn't notice it. "The biggest

## Smart-size your kitchen

We can take action against ever-growing portion sizes and smart-size our kitchens, dietitian Lisa Young says. The best way to stop adding unwanted pounds is to eat sensible portions. To pick the right portions at home:

- ♥ **Seek out** appropriately sized dinner plates (9-inch), glasses (6-ounce for juice, 8-ounce for milk), and bowls (4- and 8-ounce).
- ♥ **Limit your shopping** to once or twice a week and only purchase food in amounts that are appropriate for your family. Remember, the more you buy, the more you eat. For example, for that special treat buy two muffins for the two of you instead of a pack of six.
- ♥ **Cook only the amount needed** for your family. If you cook in large batches, freeze or store the extra servings in single-meal-size containers right away.

♥ **Use your hand as a guide** for portions. A serving of meat is the size of your palm. One cup of food is about the size of a clenched fist. A teaspoon of cooking fat is about the size of the tip of your thumb.

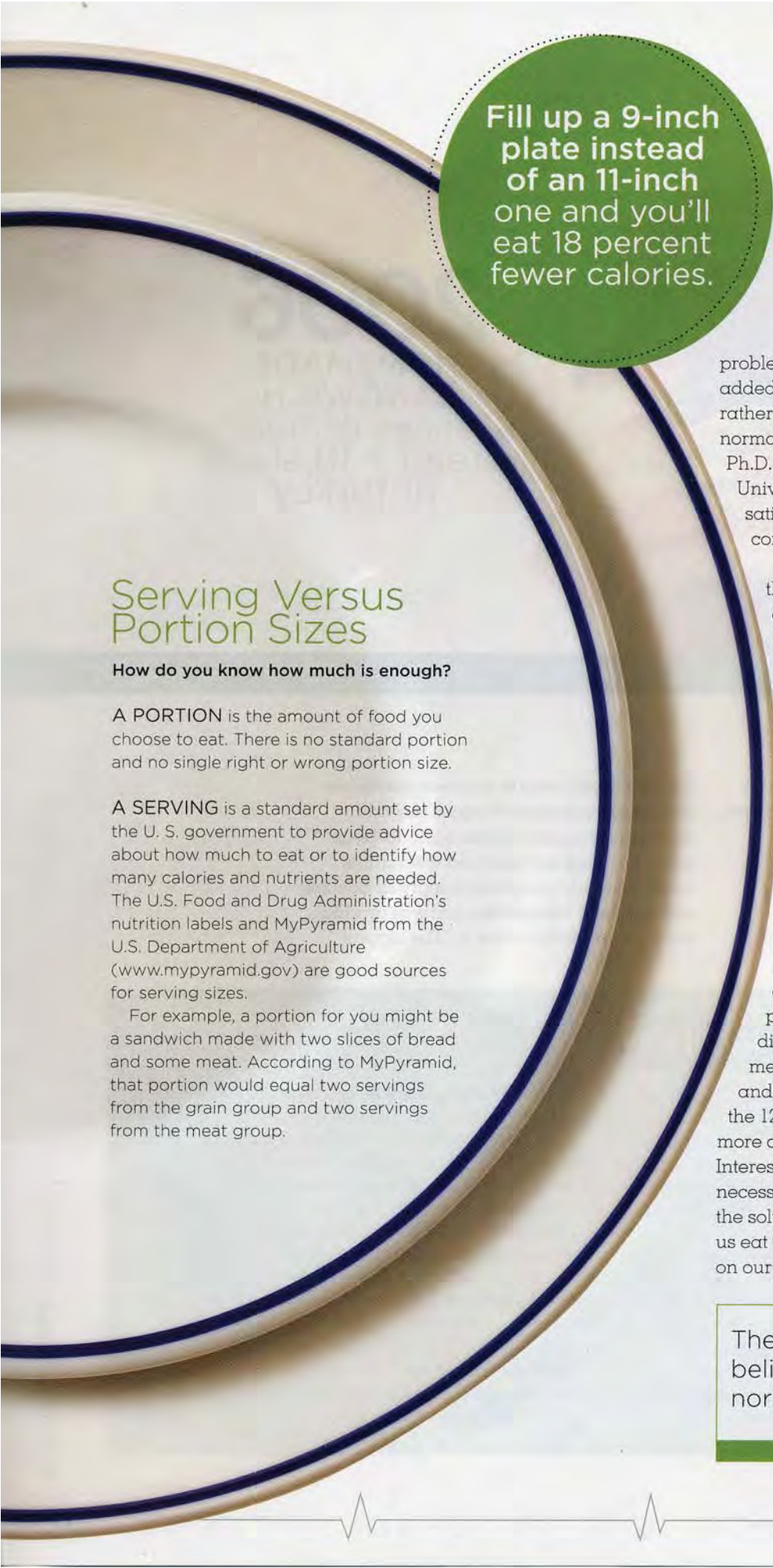
♥ **Measure your portions** occasionally using standard measuring cups and spoons. This will help you clarify portion sizes and keep them from growing bigger.

♥ **Always transfer your food** to a plate or bowl, rather than eating directly from the container or package.

♥ **Put the sensible portions** on your plate at the beginning of the meal, then avoid taking second helpings. Resign from the "clean your plate club."

♥ **Make it a goal** to eat three meals every day. Skipping meals may lead to eating larger portions or unhealthy snacking. Eat breakfast every day.





Fill up a 9-inch plate instead of an 11-inch one and you'll eat 18 percent fewer calories.

## Serving Versus Portion Sizes

**How do you know how much is enough?**

A **PORTION** is the amount of food you choose to eat. There is no standard portion and no single right or wrong portion size.

A **SERVING** is a standard amount set by the U. S. government to provide advice about how much to eat or to identify how many calories and nutrients are needed. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's nutrition labels and MyPyramid from the U.S. Department of Agriculture ([www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)) are good sources for serving sizes.

For example, a portion for you might be a sandwich made with two slices of bread and some meat. According to MyPyramid, that portion would equal two servings from the grain group and two servings from the meat group.

problem with larger portions is not just the added calories associated with them, but rather a shift in our thinking of what is a normal serving," says Wahida Karmally, Ph.D., R.D., director of nutrition at Columbia University. "Serving sizes that were satisfying 30 years ago are now often considered too small and inadequate."

As a result, children are growing up thinking that their supersize portions are perfectly OK. But that's not OK with Karmally. "The impact on future generations is a significant concern," she says. The 6-ounce bagel a child might eat for breakfast is actually equivalent to six slices of bread. A 4-inch bakery cookie has the calorie tally of six to eight Oreos.

"Visual clues are important," says Barbara Rolls, Ph.D., nutrition professor at Pennsylvania State University. A study she conducted showed that adults, when served four different portions of macaroni and cheese, ate 30 percent more calories when given the largest portion. Fewer than half noticed any difference in serving sizes. Likewise, men and women were served 6-, 8-, 10-, and 12-inch submarine sandwiches. Given the 12-inch sub, women ate 31 percent more calories and men 56 percent more. Interestingly, those who ate more food did not necessarily feel more full. Apparently part of the solution lies in being aware that most of us eat what's in front of us. If we put less food on our plates, we might eat less. **HHL**

The impact on children, who believe supersize portions are normal, is significant.



# My how we've grown

As foods get bigger, calories increase, too

FOOD	1960	2006
Bagel	2 ounces (140 calories)	4-6 ounces (320-400 calories)
Muffin	 1.5 ounces (150 calories)	 5-6 ounces (500-600 calories)
Cookie	2-inch diameter (.5 ounces) (50 calories)	4- to 5-inch diameter (3-4 ounces) (300-400 calories)
Chocolate bar	1 ounce (150 calories)	1.5-6 ounces (225-900 calories)
Ice cream	½ cup (150 calories)	1½ cups (350 calories)
Cola	 6.5 ounces (85 calories)	 24 ounces (300 calories)
Beer, can	12 fluid ounces (150 calories)	12-24 fluid ounces (150-300 calories)
Juice	6 ounces (85 calories)	8-20 ounces (110-280 calories)
Individual chips	 1 ounce (150 calories)	 2-3 ounces (300-450 calories)
Baby food	3-4 ounces	3-6 ounces
French fries	2.4 ounces (240 calories)	6.2 ounces (540 calories)
Hot dog	 3.2 ounces (260 calories)	 5.4 ounces (580 calories)
Hamburger	4 ounces (320 calories)	12 ounces (920 calories)

*Source: Manufacturers and U. S. Department of Agriculture. The weight and calories may vary slightly from one manufacturer to another.*