



Live Well, Work Well

The USDA website provides extensive information about healthy eating, proper portion sizes and recommended daily food intake customized to your age, gender and activity level.

HEALTHY PORTION SIZES

Did you know that in the 1980s, a typical bagel had 140 calories and a 3-inch diameter? Today, a bagel averages 6 inches and is a whopping 350 calories! With 64-ounce fountain drinks, jumbo-size snacks, massive restaurant entrees and the ability to “up-size” fast food for pennies more, it is easy to get confused about proper portion size.

What is a Portion?

A portion is the amount of a specific food an individual eats for a meal or snack. Many factors affect food portions, such as age, gender, activity level, appetite, and where or when the food is obtained and eaten.

What Is the Difference Between Portions and Servings?

A portion is the amount of food you choose to eat. There is no standard or correct portion size. A serving is a standard amount (issued by the USDA) used to give advice about how much to eat, and to identify how many calories and nutrients are in a particular food. This is the information located on the nutritional label of a food product (serving size).

For example:

You eat a sandwich with two slices of bread.

- The nutrition label on the bread states that the serving size is one slice.
- Your portion is two slices, which equals two servings.

Healthy Portion Sizes

For a general idea of the amount of food you should be consuming, use the following recommendations:

- A serving of meat is about 2 or 3 ounces—about the size of the palm of your hand.

- One serving of grains is equal to one slice of bread, one ounce of cereal, or half a cup of pasta or rice.
- A serving of fruit or vegetables is equal to one piece of fresh fruit or vegetable, half a cup of chopped, or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of either juice. In general, it's not as necessary to be vigilant about vegetable and fruit intake, as any amount is healthy—just be aware of the sugar content in fruit.
- The USDA recommends you make at least half your plate fruits and vegetables, along with lean protein and whole grains.

Break Down Your Meal

It might be easier to figure out how much you are consuming if consider what you are about to eat. For example, here is how you would break down a spaghetti dinner:

Spaghetti Noodles –

Your portion: 2 cups

Serving size: $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

Number of pasta servings: 4

Tomato Sauce –

Your portion: 1 cup

Serving size: $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

Number of sauce servings: 2

Meatballs –

Your portion: 6 ounces

Serving size: 2 ounces

Number of meatball servings: 3

Don't forget to calculate any appetizers, drinks or side dishes you consume with your meal as well. For example:

HEALTHY PORTION SIZES

Garlic Bread –

Your portion: 2 slices

Serving size: 1 slice

Number of bread servings: 2

Soft Drink –

Your portion: 24 ounces

Serving size: 12 ounces

Number of beverage servings: 2

The USDA website provides guidelines for serving size and recommended servings per day of each food group. The recommended servings depend on age and gender, but here are some general guidelines for adults:

- **Vegetables:** 2.5-3 cups per day
- **Fruits:** 2 cups per day
- **Grains:** 3-4 ounces per day
- **Protein:** 5-6 ounces per day
- **Dairy:** 3 cups per day

Based on these guidelines, that one sample meal would have satisfied protein and pasta recommended servings for the entire day.

When taking into account other meals, snacks, and beverages consumed throughout the day, it is easy to see why so many Americans overeat.

Try to keep your daily intake within the general guidelines set by the USDA. Your portions do not have to match the standard serving size—they can be smaller or larger. However, the amount you eat throughout the day should match the total amount of food that is recommended.

MyPlate

The USDA created MyPlate to replace the traditional food pyramid, to make it easier for Americans to make healthy food choices. If you find it difficult to adhere to the recommended daily servings, try focusing on these MyPlate guidelines instead:

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Make at least half your grains whole grains.
- Go lean with protein.
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat dairy.

Tips for Choosing Sensible Portions

To avoid overeating when eating out, consider the following strategies:

- Choose a small- or medium-size portion. If out for dinner, see if you can have the lunch portion.
- If the main dish portions are larger than you want, order an appetizer or side dish instead, or split the main entrée with a friend.
- Never force yourself to keep eating. When you are full, stop. Take the rest home and enjoy it as a meal the next day.
- Stay away from “all-you-can-eat” buffets.

To control portion sizes at home, try the following strategies:

- Every so often, measure out the typical portion of foods you eat often, using standard measuring cups. This will help you estimate the portion size—and you’ll likely be surprised to find out exactly how much you are eating.
- Use a smaller plate for your meal. People tend to eat more out of habit when it’s on a bigger plate.
- Put sensible portions on your plate at the beginning of the meal, and don’t go back for seconds. Chances are, if you sit back and let your meal digest, you will find you are satisfied in about 10-15 minutes.