



Portions Out of Control

By Joe Stein, President



In addition to baseball spring training, March Madness and St. Patrick's Day, The American Dietetic Association has declared March National Nutrition Month. Put down the corn beef and cabbage, green beer, and fantasy league sheets. Let's talk about nutrition in general and portion control in particular.

By 2008, most of my clients have good ideas about healthy and mindful food choices. One of the most often asked questions is, "I know what is good for me. But how much? What constitutes a portion?" As Americans, we tend to think if a little of something healthy is good, then more is better...right? American Dietetic Association spokesperson Elizabeth Ward, RD, summed it up, "People need to realize when it comes to weight control, they can eat any food they want, as long as they control the portion and get regular physical activity, too."

Several years ago, a client swore she only ate healthy foods but could not lose more than a few pounds of excess weight. As part of her nutrition and weight management program, I asked her to prepare several dinner plates for me when preparing dinner for her family. "Roasted chicken, mashed potatoes and peas make for a healthy dinner, right Trainer Joe?" Upon evaluating her exquisitely prepared dinner plate, I found a breast, wing, thigh and leg of chicken, two ounces of peas, and a pile of mashed potatoes that was so big it rivaled Mount Blanc. All healthy food, but the chicken was two portions, the peas half a portion and potatoes are still being analyzed by the lab.

So what constitutes a portion? For prepared foods, look at the information on the label. You may choose to eat more or less than what is a suggested serving; at least you are aware of what you are *really* eating. As for food you prepare yourself or eat at a restaurant, the following guidelines are helpful in estimating healthy food servings:

<u>Food</u>	<u>Serving Size</u>	<u>Compares to</u>
Meat, poultry or fish	3 ounces	size of a computer mouse or deck of playing cards
Fruit	½ cup	small fist
Cheese	1 ounce	your thumb
Milk or yogurt	1 cup	your hand holding a tennis ball

Vegetables, rice or pasta	½ cup	small fist
Wine	5 ounces	a lot less than you think

Some additional helpful hints to guide your control of portions include:

Measure the glasses, cups, and bowl you use in your home. I was shocked to find my red wine glasses held twelve ounces, over twice what constitutes a portion. My cereal bowls held two servings of cereal.

Know how much you are eating. Invest in a food scale. A nice one can be purchased from Linen N' Things for under \$40.

Read what constitutes a serving or portion on prepared food. For example, a serving of Snapple contains about 120 calories, not too many, one might think. But...a 16-ounce bottle contains *two* servings, totaling 240 calories! To burn up 240 calories, one would have to run for almost 40 miles at a fast 8-mph pace. Is flavored ice tea worth that?

Bridge the gap. Practice what the Germans call “ess mit verstanden,” eating with understanding. As you increase your level of awareness, remember that these skills take time to develop. Start with one meal. Exercising your mind about making smart food choices is a lot easier than trying to exercise away indiscretions. Bridging the gap between good intentions and action is the most challenging exercise of all.

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