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Avoid portion distortion

By chrissy gray

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Welcome to America in 2010, the land of gigantic food portions where our restaurants provide us with anything from giant mugs of soda and enormous bags of chips to the endless pasta bowls and super-sized pizza slices. It is clear that portion size has become grossly overestimated, and our idea of portion sizes is way out of whack. It seems that many people are now confusing portions with servings.

A portion is an arbitrary amount of food that you put on your plate, whereas a serving is a specific measurement of food, such as in cups or tablespoons. Serving sizes are used to provide consumers with healthy and appropriate nutrition information and portion-size guidelines. They are used by government agencies like the U.S. Department of Agriculture to recommend standardized amounts of different types of foods needed for health and weight control.

If your portion sizes are out of control, it is likely that you are super-sizing your meals and yourself. Nowadays, unfortunately, it is all too common to consume three or four or even five servings at a time as one so-called "portion." Following are several tips to help you regulate portion sizes and better understand the "serving" as a whole.

- Use measuring cups and food scales: Train yourself to know what recommended serving sizes look like in your bowls and on your plates. This will help you to establish visual cues so you can better estimate servings without using measuring tools

in the future.

- Read labels: When looking at the nutrition facts on product labels, get in the habit of glancing at the serving size. Many times, there may be three to four servings in an item that you thought was only one serving. This way, you will be more aware of the total calories, carbs, protein and fat you will ingest if you consume that item.

- Use a smaller plate: When eating at home, use a smaller plate for your meals. Often, a salad plate is more conducive to accurate serving sizes than a dinner plate. Researchers have observed that the average size of a dinner plate in the 1950s was 9 inches across. By the 1980s, it had grown to 11 inches, and today the average dinner plate is a monstrous 13 inches across.

- Don't clean your plate: Most of us were taught from an early age that it was wrong, and even punishable, to leave food on our plates. That mentality has got to stop. Your mother is no longer staring over your shoulder making sure you eat every last bite, so don't. Get comfortable with the idea that it is OK to leave some food on your plate. Eat until you are full, then stop.

- Don't use serving bowls: Avoid putting serving bowls or containers on the dinner table. Prepare your plate, and then go to a separate area to eat it. If you are still hungry when your plate is empty, wait at least 15 minutes before serving yourself a second helping.

- Eat only half: At restaurants, cut your entire meal in half. Eat half and send the rest of your plate back to the kitchen to be wrapped up. This way, you consume half the calories you otherwise would have, and you will have lunch packed up for the

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next day.

- Order small: When ordering anything at a restaurant, order from the small plates menu, tapas, appetizer or kids' menu. These portions usually are smaller, and will keep you from overeating. Remember, you can always order more if needed.
- Prepare only what you need: When cooking, try to prepare only as much as is needed. Overcooking leads to overeating. If you are trying to cook for two meals, be sure to package up the second meal and put it away before serving yourself the remainder.
- Don't eat while distracted: Distraction while eating -- whether it is by television, the computer or reading material -- can lead you to eat far more than usual. If you're doing something like watching a movie, and you decide to have a snack, pause the movie until you're done eating.

Chrissy Gray is manager of SkinSpirit REBALANCE Metabolic Weight Loss. For more information about the program, feel free to e-mail her at rebalance@skinspirit.com.

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