

HABIT 3: PORTION SIZES

Take note of your eating behaviors and environment. Many of us eat for reasons besides hunger.



Goal: Increase the portion size of healthy foods and decrease your portion size of unhealthy foods.

It is important to understand food portion sizes because overeating can adversely affect our health. Start by knowing how many calories you need daily. Use the online [Mayo Clinic Healthy Weight Pyramid Tool](#) to customize your daily caloric needs. Then, practice the following skills to make improvements.

Portion size vs. serving size. A portion is the amount of food on your plate. A serving is a precise amount of food, defined by common measurements such as cups, ounces, or tablespoons. A serving is generally a recommended amount and often found on food labels. Check labels carefully for number of servings as there may be two or more servings in the purchased container. **Remember:** The nutrition information on the label, including calories, is shown per serving. If you often eat two servings of that food, you would take in twice the calories, fat and other nutrients. To learn serving sizes, try pouring dry cereal into a bowl and estimate how much you have poured. Then pour the amount into a measuring cup. Compare this to the recommended serving size for cereal. This is a useful exercise for commonly enjoyed foods.

Visual cues for a serving. Use [visual cues](#) for determining a serving size. For example, a hockey puck is $\sim\frac{1}{2}$ bagel, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pasta, or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dry cereal (equal to one 'serving'). A deck of cards is 3 ounces of fish, $\frac{2}{3}$ of a deck is 2-1/2 ounces of meat, and 3 to 4 dice is \sim 2 ounces of hard cheese.

Focus on food quality. All foods have a certain number of calories for a given amount. Some foods, such as sweets and processed foods, are high in [energy density](#). They contain many calories in a small amount. Other foods, like fruits and vegetables, generally are low in energy density. A large portion contains fewer calories. You get more food for the calories, vitamins, fiber, and health-promoting phytochemicals.

Practice portion control. Portion sizes can be influenced by the size of the plate, bowl, glass or even the packaging. To stay on track, consider these tips:

- Use a smaller 9" plate and fill half with fruits and vegetables
- Dish up your plate away from the table so you're not tempted for seconds
- Share an entrée or take home half your meal
- Use prepared single servings
- Measure out a serving instead of eating directly from the box or bag