

Eating Less of the Food you Love

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My friends and I love to cook and eat good food. It is food that tastes good, looks good, and is even good for me much of the time. I would like to think that I do not eat more of this good food just because it's in front of me. After all, I'm an adult with self control. There are times when this is not easy to do. Not only do I have trouble with delicious, home cooked and healthy food, but also with snacks, such as potato chips or corn chips.

Research has shown that large portions lead to overeating. This is the case whether the food is something that tastes good or not. That's right, if the portion is large, we eat more even if it doesn't taste very good. Unfortunately, large portion sizes are common these days in the marketplace, in restaurants, and in our refrigerators and cupboards.

Why are larger portions so common? You've probably noticed that, for just a little bit more money, you can get much bigger portion sizes. If you're living on a tight income, you're probably trying to get the most for your food dollar. Getting the best buy seems so sensible. But those extra-large sodas and big servings of fries aren't necessarily a good buy if they're causing you and your children to put on unwanted pounds.

A quick look at calories can show the hidden cost of larger portion sizes. Consider soda - going from a 12 oz. can of regular (non-diet) soda to a 20 oz. bottle adds about 100 calories, for a total of almost 250 calories. How about french fries? Ordering a large fry instead of a small serving can more than double your calories, often adding up to more than 500 calories. Five-hundred calories is about 25 percent of the total calories that many people need in a whole day.

How can you avoid eating too much? There isn't one simple answer because the reasons why people eat the way they do differ. Some people mostly eat at home, some eat on the run, and some eat out at restaurants. Whatever your reason, there are some simple tips that might help.

1. **Bring along healthy choices.** Learning ways to help you get through busy days when you're out-and-about while still making good food choices is one challenge. Grab snacks you can take from home that will help you get good nutrition, fewer calories, and save money. Bringing along fruit, yogurt, or whole grain crackers, and having a water bottle on hand, are good options. Eating these foods with your children provides reinforcement of good habits that will pay off for years to come.
2. **Eat just half.** It's hard to think about giving up your favorite foods, but you shouldn't have to give them up just to keep your portions in check. Try the "eat half" method. For example, if you usually enjoy a whole deli or sub sandwich, try eating just half the sandwich at a meal. Add a salad and fruit to round out the meal. Chances are you'll end up with more nutrients and fewer calories.
3. **Bring home leftovers.** If you spend a lot of time in restaurants, it will come as no surprise that the portions can be huge. Think about how much you want to eat before the meal is served and get a "take home" container when the meal is first served. Fill up the container right away so that you leave a smaller portion on your plate. You can always eat more from the container, but if you're full, you probably won't.
4. **Small packages can be your friend.** Once you start dipping your hand into the potato chip bag, it's hard to keep track of how much you've had. Instead of buying a large bag, why not buy the small bags, and eat from just one. Even if you open a second small bag, you can keep better track of how much you've eaten. Don't forget, the large bags of chips aren't a good deal if it means you eat more and put on more weight.
5. **Read the labels.** Nutrition facts labels on packaged foods provide you with information about the number of calories in each serving, and how many servings are in a package. People are often surprised by what they learn when they read the label. Figure out how much a serving is, how many servings are in the package, and then be aware of how many servings you're eating. Just having an awareness of your own eating habits may help to control your intake.

Although each of us has the responsibility to figure out how to manage our overall food intake, the steady increase in portion sizes is not making this easy. Becoming aware of portions is a first step on the road to changing habits. The next step is believing that you can make a change!

Do you know what to eat?
Check out <http://healthvermont.gov/eatforhealth>