

Portion Sizes and School-Age Children

Bigger May Not Be Better

The USDA Food Guide Pyramid gives guidelines for healthy eating that will help Americans avoid excess calories, fat and sugar. However, foods are commonly served or packaged in "portion sizes" that are larger than the standard sizes recommended by the Pyramid.

Large portion sizes lead to overeating

- 67% of Americans usually eat everything or almost everything on their plates.¹
- Men offered larger portions in a study ate 50% more food than when offered smaller portions.²
- The amount of cereal eaten by adults was approximately twice the serving size listed on the box.³
- Children as young as five years of age eat more food when offered larger portion sizes than when offered "normal" portion sizes.⁴

How large are we talking about?⁵

Commonly available food portions were compared with the standard portion serving sizes recommended by the Food Guide Pyramid. Nutritionists found the following:

- Cookies as much as 7 times the recommended serving size.
- Cooked pasta nearly 5 times the recommended serving size.
- Muffins weighing in at over 3 times the recommended serving size.

A comparison of two popular portions

	Number of Pyramid Serving Sizes					Fat and Calories
	Dairy	Meats	Vegetables	Fruit	Breads	
Smaller size portioned meal	Number of servings in the portion					
Hamburger	0	1.5	0	0	2	26 grams of fat
Small fries	0	0	1	0	0	10 grams of fat
Small Soda (16 ounces)	0	0	0	0	0	150 calories
Super-size portioned meal	Number of servings in the portion					
Big Mac	0	2.5	0	0	3	34 grams of fat
Super-size fries	0	0	3	0	0	29 grams of fat
Super-size Soda (42 ounces)	0	0	0	0	0	410 calories

Both of these portions have no servings from the dairy and fruit groups. While the fries are technically a vegetable, they are a high-fat option that is lower in antioxidants and other health-promoting nutrients found in deep yellow and green leafy vegetables. The 5 A Day for Better Health Program's guidelines advocate that Americans eat more fruits and vegetables as part of a higher-fiber, lower-fat eating style. French fries **do not** count towards the 5 A Day goal because of their high fat content.

¹ AICR News Release, January 15, 2001.

² Am J Clin Nutr 2002; 76: 1207-13.

³ UNE Cooperative Extension, "Food Reflections," October 2002.

⁴ J Am Diet Assoc 2000; 100: 232-4.

⁵ Am J Public Health 2002; 92: 246-249.

⁶ www.vanderbilt.edu/dining/nffs_portionsizes.htm.