



Week 8: March 21-27 Eating Out

Americans are surrounded by huge food portions in restaurants, fast food places, gas stations and movie theaters. Researchers have found that people tend to eat most or all of what they are served, rather than taking leftovers home in a carryout box. Some of these meals could actually feed two or more people! Over time, this type of eating will cause weight gain if it isn't balanced with physical activity.

Even at home, where we have control over how much we put on our plates, many individuals are eating larger portions because they've grown accustomed to the portion sizes served in restaurants. Even our plates, glasses and cups are larger than they were 30 years ago.

Articles have been published that claim Americans no longer can identify appropriate serving sizes, a distortion which results in consuming more calories. For instance, a small, two-and-a-half ounce serving of French fries has 210 calories, compared to 610 calories in the seven-ounce size. While a 12-ounce soft drink contributes 150 calories to a meal, a mega size 42-ounce cup adds 410 calories. The meal with a huge soft drink, a giant hamburger and an order of extra large fries can total as much as 2,000 calories. When comparing that one meal to the 1800 to 2000 calories the average adult woman needs all day, her daily caloric needs have been met without the milk, fruits, vegetables or whole grains that she needs. Below is an example of how American's perceptions of portion sizes have changed in the past 20 years when it applies to movie popcorn:

Movie Popcorn



Twenty Years Ago
Serving Size: 5 cups
Calories/serving: 270



Today
Serving Size: Large Tub
Calories/serving: 630

List below are some reasons given for not eating healthy food, along with some suggestions on ways to overcome the challenges:

- I am not going to start cooking from scratch! Who has the time or energy? Besides, I am not sure how to cook any more.

Studies show that family mealtime can increase the nutrients consumed, help improve social skills and form family bonds. The beauty is that cooking from scratch and staying in the kitchen for hours is not required. Using fresh produce and fresh meat, meals can be prepared quickly; many cookbooks and magazines feature meals that can be prepared in 30 minutes or less. In addition, the use of crockpots and slowcookers provides easy one-dish meals. Successful meal preparation does require planning. For example, creating a weekly menu takes time when you first start but saves time and money in the long run.

- I travel and have to eat out.

Read the online menu before going to a restaurant. By deciding in advance what you want to order, you are more likely to make healthy choices, rather than choices made while hungry. Also, by selecting your meal before you go to the restaurant, the smells will not be as tempting.

- Eating out is fun, and I don't plan on giving that up.

You can still eat healthy by sharing a meal, ordering a couple of appetizers and splitting one main course with another person when you go out for a meal. Four people can enjoy a taste or two of a decadent dessert without feeling guilty.

If you're not sharing a meal, eat half of what you're served and take the rest home to enjoy as another meal.

If you have a hard time leaving food on your plate and do not like to ask for the take out box, remember there are two ways to waste food: you can throw it out or carry it around as fat cells.

On the following page, you will find a few more examples of how portion perceptions can easily be distorted and lead to significant weight gain. Below these examples is a short list of "Additional Resources" to assist you in making your restaurant experience a healthy one.

More Portion Distortion Examples



Additional resources

A Diner's Guide to Health and Nutrition Claims on Restaurant Menus
<http://www.cspinet.org/reports/dinersgu.html>

Healthy Fast Food: Tips for Making Healthier Fast Food Choices
http://www.helpguide.org/life/fast_food_nutrition.htm