

A Visual View of Serving Size using Everyday Items

I'm sure you've heard it said over and over again, that the key to a healthy diet and weight management is portion control. The concept is easy: if you eat less, you consume fewer calories, and therefore you lose weight! But, what does a "portion" of food look like?

With the current trend to up-size or super-size meals, it can be really tough to figure out what a "normal" portion size should look like. Most people do know the basics about nutrition, however, we must be aware of just how *much* we are eating. This is just as important as *what* we eat.

What is the difference between a serving and a portion?

A food serving helps you understand how much food is recommended from each of the food groups within the Balance of Good Health, or the Food Pyramid. In some cases, a food serving may be close to what we actually eat, such as an apple. In other cases we may serve more than one food serving, for example rice or pasta.

A portion is the amount of food we *choose to eat*. There are no standard portion sizes. Since it would be impossible for us to carry our weighing scales with us everyday to measure our food portions, being able to estimate what a serving size looks like, is really useful in making sure we aren't overeating.

How can we determine what a reasonable portion of food would look like?

Often we remember items easier when we can visualise their size, shape or weight, in comparison to something else. Relating the portion size of a serving to **everyday items** is an easy way to visualise what a true portion size looks like.

Please remember the list below gives examples of the size, shape, and/or look of **one serving** of a particular food.

- **A rounded handful** - one 1/2 cup vegetables or fruit, 1/2 cup of cooked rice or pasta, or a snack serving of crisps or pretzels
- **Woman's fist** - another way of visualising a serving of vegetables, or one piece of whole fruit
- **Four dice** = 1 oz cheese
- **A golf ball** - 1/4 cup of dried fruit
- **A matchbox** - a 1 oz serving of meat, or a serving of cheese
- **Deck of cards, or the palm of your hand** (excluding fingers) - a 3oz serving (recommended serving) of meat, fish or poultry, or ten chips/french fries
- **Thin paperback book** - a 8 oz serving of meat
- **Check book** - a serving of fish (approximately 3 oz)
- **Tennis ball** - 1/2 to 2/3 cup of pasta, or a serving of ice cream

- **Computer mouse** – $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ cup - a medium baked potato
- **Compact disc** - one serving of pancake or small waffle
- **Thumb tip or one dice** - one teaspoon of margarine
- **A ping pong ball** - two tablespoons of peanut butter
- **Small milk carton** - 8 oz glass of milk
- **A baseball** - 8 oz cup of yogurt, one cup of beans, or one cup of dry cereal

It is also a good idea to weigh some of your favorite foods, and try to remember what they look like on your plate. You will then be able to see what a $\frac{1}{2}$ cup, or 3 oz serving looks like. This will help you to visualise what an appropriate serving looks like, and it could help to prevent overeating.