Healthy Eating: Controlling Your Portions

Dairy · Fruits · Grains · Protein · Vegetables

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- Bread, starchy foods, or grain should take up a little more than one-fourth of your plate.
- Meat or another protein should take up a little less than one-fourth of your plate.
- Vegetables and fruit should fill the remaining half of your plate.
- Add one cup of milk or yogurt to your meal.

How can you control portions when eating out?

Before eating out

- Try to make wise choices for the rest of the day. But don't skip meals before you go out to eat.
- Try not to arrive at the restaurant overly hungry. It's harder to make healthy food choices when you get too hungry.
- Take your own fruits or vegetables if you will be eating at a restaurant that does not offer them. Bring an apple or a bag of baby carrots to add to your fast-food meal.

Avoiding big meals

- Don't upgrade your meal to a larger size.
- Ask for a half-size portion. Or ask if the restaurant offers lunch-sized portions, which tend to be smaller.
- Avoid all-you-can-eat menu options and buffet-style restaurants.

Other tips

- Share an entree, or take some of your food home for another meal.
- Put half of your meal in a to-go box. Ask your server to bring the box with your meal, so that you can split the meal before you even take the first bite.
- Fill up on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
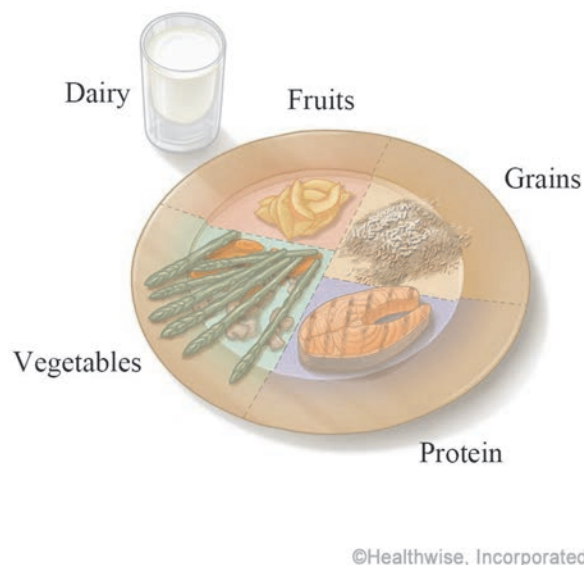
Why do portion sizes matter?

Overeating is easy in our culture today. Portions at fast-food and other restaurants are so large that one meal can provide an entire day's worth of calories. Research shows that when people are given larger portions, they eat more.

> Cutting back on the size of your portions can be a great way to get to or stay at a healthy weight, without giving up any of your favorite foods.
>
> You don't have to try to restrict the foods you like. Eat them less often. Eat smaller portions. Rather than focusing on a particular type of diet, try to eat healthier foods.

What are the right portion sizes?

The picture on this page shows suggested portion sizes for a dinner. You can divide your plate into four parts to see how much space each food should take:

- Share your appetizers and desserts.

- Think of meat as a side dish instead of as the main part of your meal.

- Order sauces, gravies, and salad dressings on the side, and use only a little.

How can you avoid getting too full?

Try to stop eating before you get too full. Being too full is uncomfortable. It means you ate too much. Get in touch with what "satisfied," or "pleasantly full," feels like for you.

Try these tips:

- Relax before you start eating, and then eat slowly.

- Stop a quarter of the way through your meal, and check your hunger level. If you're still hungry, keep eating, but stop again at the halfway point.

- Remember that you don't have to clean your plate.

Eat what you need now
Don't eat more now because you think you might not have time to eat later. Eat what your body needs now.

Keep a schedule
Some people find that it's easier to schedule lots of small meals throughout the day. Other people do better with "three square meals."

Whichever you choose, try to eat on a regular schedule every day, according to how hungry you usually get. Eating regular meals can help you be more aware of hunger and fullness.

Deal with cravings
When you start feeling like you want something to eat, rate your hunger on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being starving and 10 being so full you feel sick. A rating of 5 or 6 means you're comfortable—you're not too hungry or too full.

Eat when your hunger is at 3 or 4 on the scale. Choose a healthy meal or snack. Stop eating when you reach 5 or 6 on the scale. Don't wait until your hunger gets down to 1 or 2, since getting too hungry can lead to overeating.

If you check your hunger level and you're not truly hungry, try doing something else besides eating, like taking a short walk.

Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information? It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.