Portion Distortion

“Super-size me!”, “Biggie, please!”, “I'll have a King Size!”, “Make it a Double-Double!” The food portion sizes ordered in restaurants and eaten at daily meals have increased in size during recent years. Isn’t it ironic that Americans, with their obsession to be thin and to go on diets, have added larger food portions to their plates?

- Controlling portion size is important to our health. The amount of food you eat plays an important role in maintaining a healthy weight and preventing weight gain.

- So, how do you decide your portion size? How do you determine the portion size of food you should serve at dinner, for a snack or other eating occasions? Distorted portions are found in meals (i.e., super-sized, fast food combos), beverages (i.e., biggie drinks or venti lattes) and even snack foods (i.e., king size candy bars or family size popcorn).

- Serving up the right portion size varies from person to person. To determine your needs, visit www.mypyramid.gov. Below are some helpful measuring tips to determine how large a portion size might be:
  - 3 oz. cooked meat, fish or poultry = a deck of playing cards
  - 1 cup = 1 baseball
  - ½ cup = ½ baseball
  - 1 teaspoon = tip of a thumb (to the first joint)
  - 1 tablespoon = 3 thumb tips
Tips to Help You Choose Sensible Portions

When dining out:

- Order an appetizer instead of the entrée (beware of fried appetizers).
- Ask for the lunch portion. You might have to pay dinner prices, but it beats the extra calories.
- Resign from the "clean your plate club" - when you've eaten enough, leave the rest or ask for a "doggie bag."
- Ask for salad dressing to be served "on the side." Briefly dip your fork in dressing (allow excess to drip from fork tines), then gather salad with your fork. You won't even miss all that extra salad dressing and you'll save a lot of calories and fat.
- Order an item from the menu instead of the "all you can eat."

At home:

- Once or twice, measure the typical portion of foods you eat often. Use standard measuring cups. This will help you estimate the portion size of these foods and similar foods.
- Be especially careful to limit portions of foods high in calories, such as cookies, cakes, other sweets, and fats, oils and spreads.
- Try using a smaller plate for your meal.
- Put sensible portions on your plate at the beginning of the meal, and don't take "seconds."

References:

1. “Portion Distortion” by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Available at hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/portion.