



Our weight is increasing along with our meals – it's time to size things up!

Over the past 20 years, portion sizes have been on the rise along with our waistlines, with seven million Australians now obese or overweight. Experts agree it's time we start downsizing our meals and taking charge of not just what, but also how much, we put in our mouths.

Obesity specialists in Australia have researched the link between portion distortion and weight gain – and, in turn, discovered portion control is an effective weight management tool.

'When portion sizes increase, people overeat unintentionally,' dietitian Melanie

Are you suffering from
PORTION DISTORTION

82 | New Idea

Picture this These visual food prompts might help you keep track of your portion sizes – and your waistline!

SERVE OF CAKE = AVERAGE MOBILE PHONE	1 TSP MARGARINE = 1 DICE	PIECE OF MEAT = A DECK OF CARDS	MEDIUM SERVE OF POTATO = A COMPUTER MOUSE	SERVE OF ICE-CREAM = A TENNIS BALL
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McGrice says. Twenty years ago, takeaway coffee was water based and served in a 200ml cup. Even adding full-cream milk and two teaspoons of sugar, the maximum energy content was 400kJ. Today we can buy 470ml full-cream milk-based coffees with more than 2000kJ, almost five times the energy intake recommended for a snack!

A US study that looked at the habits of more than 60,000 people showed portion sizes are not only bigger in restaurants and takeaway outlets but at home too! Another study looked at how some cookbooks have changed over the decades, increasing the average serving sizes of meals. Combine that with the perception that more is better value for money and you've got a recipe for disaster!

UK obesity expert Dr Ian Campbell says: 'People tell me they're eating the right things, but it's not until they start weighing things up, pun intended, that you start to realise they're eating healthily but far too much of it, and their concept of what a healthy plate looks like has become distorted,' he says.

'Food has become cheaper and more readily available. The competition in restaurants is such that they start to deliver more food for less money. We're all seduced by it. But that sort of concept has made its way home onto our plates.'

Dr Campbell is an advocate of the diet plate (www.thedietplate.com.au), which shows how much of each food group should go on your plate – a palm-sized piece of fish or meat for protein, 50 per cent vegies and the remainder carbohydrates.

'It re-educates your brain to what a healthy portion looks like,' Dr Campbell says. 'We also need government involvement to minimise the impact of the food industry in exploiting people. It's only when we see people working together that we may see results, because at the moment obesity levels just keep going up.'

TOP TIP
 Keep consumption in check by downsizing especially when it comes to sugary treats. If you must indulge, go for the smallest size available!

Size matters!

Practising dietitian Clare Evangelista shares her top five tips for managing your portions:

1. Don't plate up

The size of plates, bowls and glasses has increased significantly over time, leading to greater food portions needed to fill them. Buy plates that are no more than 20cm in diameter and bowls and glasses that hold 200ml to 250ml, instead of 400ml to 500ml, to reduce your kilojoule intake.

2. Meating point

Buy meat from a butcher, rather than prepacked at the supermarket. When we buy prepacked meat it is difficult to get exactly the right amount. If you cook more than you need, you will eat more than you need. A butcher can measure out the right amount for you, or you can re-portion prepacked meats before freezing.

3. Portion caution

Buy portion-controlled packs. Choose individual serve packs such as 100g to 200g tubs of yoghurt and 30g boxes of dried fruit and nuts and other foods instead of large packs. This will take the guesswork out of portion control for these foods.

4. Mark it out

Use a permanent marker to put a mark on the outside of your cereal bowl so you always fill it to the correct amount. This can also be done on oversized glasses.

5. Soft serve

Don't let other people serve your meals onto your plate as they will usually be generous with the portions. By serving yourself you have much more control over how much you will eat.

YOUR HEALTH

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Q&A



New Idea medico Dr John D'Arcy answers all your medical questions

Q I'm allergic to dust mites. I find it hard to avoid dust and sometimes antihistamines don't work. Any tips?

ALEXANDRA, VIA EMAIL

A You'd have discovered your specific allergy by having allergy skin testing and while it's good to know that dust mites cause your wheeze or hay fever, the little devils are very hard to eradicate.

Your antihistamine doesn't get rid of your symptoms because the numbers of dust mites is so high it overpowers the allergic response of the immune system.

Dust mites feed on skin flakes and multiply in dark, humid conditions. They collect on mattresses, upholstered furniture and long-pile carpets and soft toys.

Immunotherapy, having regular injections that deliberately expose your defence system to the mites, is effective, but it takes time and it's expensive.

Cover mattresses, pillows and quilts with dust mite-resistant covers. They need to be washed every two months. Some health funds provide a rebate for these items. Wash bed linen weekly in water hotter than 55C or if you use cold water, add eucalyptus or tea tree oil. Hot tumble dry it for at least half an hour to kill any remaining mites.

Remove soft toys from the bedroom or wash them weekly and dry as you do the sheets. The older idea of putting soft toys in the freezer doesn't remove the allergens.

Make sure your house is not humid and, if you can afford it, think about removing carpets and going back to floorboards, which can be damp-mopped regularly to decrease the numbers of mites.

Damp-dust instead of using a feather duster, which spreads the mites. If buying new furniture, avoid upholstered items.

Vacuum the mattress and furniture weekly. This sets the dust mites airborne so use a mask while you do it.

A warning: chemical sprays, air filters and negative ion generators don't work.

ASK DR JOHN FOR ADVICE

Do you have a question for Dr John? Post it to Dr John D'Arcy, New Idea, GPO Box 2814, Sydney, NSW 2001, or email health@newidea.com.au.