

WELL BALANCED

- MARCH 2025 -
National Nutrition Month

Portion CONTROL AND Mindful EATING TO SUPPORT OVERALL NUTRITION



March is National Nutrition Month, a time to reflect on the importance of healthy eating. While this month serves as a helpful reminder, balanced nutrition should be a priority we strive to maintain all year long. Mindful eating is a strategy that can help create a healthier relationship with food by bringing awareness to what you eat and drink. One useful step in practicing mindful eating is understanding portions and servings.

Although the terms *portion* and *serving* are often used interchangeably, they actually have different meanings. A portion refers to the amount of food you choose to eat at one time, while a serving is the recommended amount of food, typically listed on the Nutrition Facts or food label. Understanding portions and servings can reduce overeating, support individual health and wellness goals, and promote overall well-being.

Measuring or weighing food can be useful to better understand how your portions compare to the recommended servings. Here are a few additional ways to estimate portions when you don't have access to measuring tools.

- 1 cup = the size of a baseball or an average-sized fist
- ½ cup = the size of a tennis ball or a small, scooped hand
- 3 ounces = the size of a deck of cards or the palm of a hand
- 1 tablespoon = the size of a thumb
- 1 teaspoon = the size of a postage stamp or the area between the tip and first joint of the pointer finger



Looking for more information on how to read a Nutrition Facts label?

Practice with this sample label for frozen lasagna.



Want to learn more?

Check out these resources to better understand your caloric needs!

- The Body Weight Planner tool
- MyPlate Plan

The MyPlate Plan recommends the following amounts for each food group per day.

- 2 cups of fruit
- 2½ cups of vegetables
- 5½ ounces of protein
- 2 cups of dairy
- 6 ounces of whole grains

It's important to note that everyone's nutritional needs are different. Consult your healthcare provider for an eating plan that is right for you based on your health.

Making changes to nutritional habits can be challenging, especially since food consumption is often influenced by emotional, social, and behavioral factors. These elements can make change seem even more difficult. However, change is possible. Small adjustments can lead to nutritional improvements. Here are some tips to help you manage portions more mindfully.

- Read Nutrition Facts and food labels to better understand recommended serving sizes. Pay attention to the serving size, servings per container, and key nutrients, such as total fat, added sugars, and sodium.

- Portion snacks and meals. When enjoying a snack, avoid eating directly from the bag or box. Instead, portion out a serving onto a plate or bowl. For meals, be mindful of recommended serving sizes and aim to portion your food accordingly.
- Choose whole foods. As much as possible, choose whole foods over processed foods to ensure a more balanced and nutritious diet. Keep foods such as fruits and vegetables readily available to encourage healthy eating habits and prevent overeating on processed foods.
- Eat regularly throughout the day. Following a consistent meal and snack schedule helps prevent feelings of hunger, which can impact portion control and lead to overeating.
- Share meals or take half home. Restaurant portions often provide enough servings for two or more meals. Consider sharing a dish or boxing up half at the start to enjoy later.
- Minimize visits to buffet-style restaurants. They offer easy access to large quantities of food, making portion control more challenging. Consider enjoying these outings only occasionally.

- Eat from smaller bowls and plates. This encourages smaller portions that are closer to recommended serving sizes.
- Slow down. Eating mindfully, without distractions, helps you become more aware of hunger cues and gain better control over eating habits. Slowing down allows you to recognize feelings of satisfaction and distinguish between fullness and discomfort, supporting portion control.

Understanding portions and servings is one way to incorporate mindfulness into making healthier food choices. The goal is not to aim for perfection, nor is it about giving up your favorite foods. Rather, it is more about prioritizing high-quality, nutritious foods and finding balance by making conscious, thoughtful choices to improve overall health through portion control and nutrition.

Resources

- Mindful Eating (helpguide.org)
- Food Portions: Choosing Just Enough for You (niddk.nih.gov)
- Serving Size vs. Portion Size: Is There a Difference? (eatright.org)
- MyPlate Plan (myplate.gov)

