



# How much is a SERVING?

*When you're eating healthfully and managing your weight, it's important to keep portion sizes in mind. But exactly how much is a serving of broccoli or a serving of cheese?*

It could be that many Americans are innocently overeating – and wondering why they're gaining weight. According to the American Diabetic Association, most Americans overestimate how much food makes up a serving size. Researchers found that cookie portions are 700% greater than the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines, muffins exceed the recommendation by 333%, and pasta by 480%. Food portions are 2-5 times larger than just 30 years ago, whether you're talking soft drinks, chip bags, burgers, or beer. Even cookbooks have reduced the number of servings per recipe, reflecting the expectation that people eat more. To make matters more complex, plates, bowls, cups, and tableware are larger too.

The most accurate method of determining portion sizes is to pre-measure all of your foods. Here are serving sizes from the USDA.

Food Groups (approx. calories)	Serving Size (examples)
<b>Bread/Grains/Pasta</b> (80 cal/serving) whole grains are best	1 slice of bread; 2/3 C dry cereal; 1/2 C cooked cereal, rice, or pasta
<b>Vegetables</b> (30 cal/serving)	1/2 C cooked; 1 C fresh; 2 C salad; 3/4 C vegetable juice
<b>Fruits</b> (70 cal/serving) fresh fruits are best	1 C fresh or frozen; 1/2 C chopped, cooked or canned fruit; 3/4 C fruit juice
<b>Milk/Dairy</b> (125 cal/serving) skim or low-fat	1 C of milk or yogurt; 1 oz cheese; 1 tsp butter
<b>Proteins</b> (including meats) (225 cal/serving) 12-15 g protein/serv	3 oz cooked lean meat, poultry or fish; 3 oz tofu; 1 veggie burger; 3 oz meat alternates; 1/2 C beans, lentils, split peas; 2 Tbs peanut butter; 1 oz nuts; 2 eggs or egg substitute
<b>Fats and Oils</b> (35 cal/serving)	1 tsp of oil or trans fat-free margarine; 5 olives; 1/8 avocado

Of course, you don't need to measure your food every time you eat. Estimating serving sizes is easier than you might think. Here are 3 methods – choose one and stick to it.

## The Comparison Method

One way to determine how much you're eating is to compare a serving size with a familiar object.

*(The objects here are shown at about half their actual size.)*



**1 cup = a baseball**

**1/2 cup = a billiard ball**



**1 teaspoon = 1 sugar cube**



**1 tablespoon = 1/2 ping pong ball**



**1 ounce or 2 tablespoons = a pair of dice**



**3 ounces cooked meat or poultry = a deck of cards**



**3 ounces grilled fish = a checkbook**



**1 piece of cornbread = a bar of soap**



## The Hand Method

Some people use their hands to gauge portion size. Of course, to get the most accurate measure, you'd need to measure out each serving and place it in your hand. These measurements are for an average-sized woman's hand:



**1 cup = the volume of a fist**



**1 teaspoon = the volume of the tip of a thumb**

**1 tablespoon = the volume of a thumb**



**3 ounce cooked meat, poultry, fish = the size of the palm of a hand**

## The Pre-Measured Method

To follow the pre-measured method, buy a good set of measuring spoons, a glass measuring cup for liquids, a set of measuring cups for dry foods, and a kitchen scale for weighing meat and cheese.

To save time, you can measure out 8 ounces of water (1 cup), pour it into a drinking glass, and mark the glass. You'll have a ready reference for juice, milk, and other liquids. You can do the same with cereal – hot or cold. Measure out half a cup (before adding milk, fruit, or anything else), pour it into a cereal bowl, and make note of how full the bowl is.

You'll probably be shocked at how empty the bowl looks. You can make yourself feel better by using smaller bowls! Sure, it's a psychological game. But you might feel more satisfied if your daily "bowl-ful of cereal" really is a full bowl.

You can do the same with spaghetti, salad, cooked vegetables, and any other foods you eat: Measure out a serving, put it on your plate, and visualize how much space they take up. Again, a smaller plate encourages smaller portions.

Weigh raw fruits and vegetables, but weigh meat, poultry, and fish after cooking. A serving size is 3 ounces, but restaurants give you the pre-cooked weight. Use these rules to convert raw weight into cooked weight:

With bone: 5 ounces raw equals 3 ounces cooked

Without bone: 4 ounces raw equals 3 ounces cooked

### Sources:

- *National Institutes of Health. 2009.*
- *American Diabetes Association. 2009.*
- *Food portions and servings: How do they differ? USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion.*
- *The Journal of the American Medical Association; 286(10).*
- *American Journal of Public Health; 92(2).*

## Don't Be Fooled

Resign your membership in the Clean Plate Club! Assess the amount of food on your plate, using one of the measuring methods, and then enjoy sensible dining. Keep in mind that a serving of food is generally smaller than a portion. For example, a grilled cheese sandwich is a portion made up of two servings of bread and one serving of cheese.

"My plate is full!" is not just a figurative expression – especially when it comes to restaurant dining. When dining out, split a meal with a friend, or ask the waitperson to put half of it in a take-home carton before you even touch it.

