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NEWS RELEASE

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More on Your Plate Means More at Your Waistline

It seems like gaining weight and the holidays go hand-in-hand—but do they have to? New information from Cornell University may help—put less food on your plate!

A recent study from Cornell demonstrates that the more you put on your plate, the more you are likely to eat. The study finds that when young adults are served larger portions from one week to the next they overeat by almost 40 percent. Eating larger portions over time could account for the growth of the American girth over the past 20 years, the researchers say. Volunteers who consumed the largest portions (150 percent larger than the week before) ate an average of 39 percent more food (in weight) during the week than they did the previous week, an average of 273 more calories per day. A person who eats 273 extra calories each day for a year will gain more than 28 pounds.

Studies by other researchers have shown that while Americans, on average, are not using up as many calories through activities such as exercise, work or chores compared with 20 years ago, they are taking in, on average, about 200 more calories a day than they did in the 1970s. Almost half of Americans' meals are now consumed outside the home, and restaurant portion sizes have jumped by between 20 percent and 60 percent over the past 20 years. Another study found that 35 percent of 181 food products reviewed jumped in size between the 1970s and 1999. Meanwhile, adult obesity in the United States has jumped to almost 31 percent of the population in 1999 from 14 percent in 1971. Although researchers suspect that the prevalence of larger portions plays an important role in that trend, few studies have tested the relationship.

“This data supports the powerful role that environment plays in determining food intake and possible increases in body weight,” says Levitsky. The study also showed the average amount that can be consumed before a person feels uncomfortable is about 18 ounces above a normal portion.

So how can we apply this during the holidays? When dining out, split an entrée and order an extra salad. Use a smaller plate at the buffet and serve yourself less food. Instead of getting French fries for each family member, share an order. At home, buy foods, especially high calories foods, in smaller portion sizes. Make your holiday cookies smaller and portion them into small, snack size bags instead of leaving them on a plate or in a container. Buy the amount of food you think your family can reasonably eat at one meal unless you plan to freeze the leftovers.

Source: Cornell News October 1, 2004

<http://www.news.cornell.edu/releases/Oct04/servedmore.eatmore.ssl.html>