



NEWS RELEASE

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Bigger May Not Be Better

Commonly available food portions were compared with standard portion serving sizes of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Guide Pyramid in a research study by Lisa R. Young, PhD and Marion Nestle, PhD, Department of Nutrition and Food Studies, New York University, published in the *American Journal of Public Health* (February 2002). Their findings included:

- Cookies were as much as 7 times standard portion sizes.
- Servings of cooked pasta were often nearly 5 times standard portion sizes.
- Muffins weighed in at over 3 times standard portion sizes.

Overall they found that marketplace food portions are consistently larger than in the past. They note a popular fast-food chain only offered one size of french fries in the mid-1950s. That size is now labeled "small" and is one-third the weight of the largest size in 2001. When ethnic foods are Americanized, the portion size may grow. Several examples are offered by Melanie Polk, RD and Director of Nutrition Education at the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR):

- The American croissant is bigger and contains about 100 more calories than one in France.
- When the bagel was introduced to the U.S. by Jewish bakers from Poland, it weighed 1½ ounces and contained 116 calories. Today's American bagel is about triple the size and calories. It weighs in around 4 to 4 1/2 ounces and may contain over 300 calories.
- The Mexican quesadilla has doubled in calories and increased in size. In Mexico, a quesadilla is a 5-inch tortilla containing around 540 calories and 32 grams of fat. The American quesadilla is typically 10 inches and Polk calculates that one serving could contain over 1,200 calories and 70 grams of fat.

While these larger portions may be appropriate for an active person, they may be too much for a more sedentary person. However, many of us may not think about decreasing our portion sizes in relation to our activity level.

Sixty-seven percent of Americans usually eat everything or almost everything on their plates, according to a 2001 survey by the American Institute for Cancer Research. Even lean young men who were considered able to regulate their food intake well ate more when offered larger portions in a research study conducted by Dr. Barbara Rolls, Pennsylvania State University nutrition professor and author of *Volumetrics: Feel Full on Fewer Calories*. They ate 10 ounces of a 16-ounce portion of macaroni. However, when offered 25 ounces, they ate 15 ounces, a 50 percent increase!

BOTTOM LINE: If you're putting on the pounds, check those portion sizes!

Source: Food Reflections Newsletter, October 2002 by Alice Henneman, MS, RD, Extension Educator, ahenneman1@unl.edu; University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension - Lancaster County