

WHEN IT COMES TO EATING HEALTHY, HOW MUCH YOU EAT IS ALMOST AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT YOU EAT.

Portion Power

STUFFING YOURSELF DURING A MEAL IS UNHEALTHY.

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A lot of people try to be healthier by eating and drinking foods that are good for their bodies. And that's smart. For instance, an apple is better for you than a candy bar. Or a glass of water is healthier than a can of soda. But did you know that how *much* you eat plays a big role in your health as well?

People eat in units, says Lisa R. Young, author of *The Portion Teller Plan*. And the **portions** that end up on people's plates, whether in restaurants or at home, are larger than ever. When it comes to oversize portions, Young tells *Choices*, "whether you finish your plate or whether you have the mentality that you're not going to finish it, either way the bigger portion will get you to eat more."

Bad Choices

Morgan McCorvey, 17, of Southlake, Texas, agrees. Before she lost 100 pounds at Wellspring Academy of California, a boarding school for overweight teens, Morgan had trouble making **sensible** decisions about food. "The worst I can remember is that I would go to Wendy's twice a day, before and after the gym," she says. Even when reaching for a healthy snack, Morgan says, she'd sometimes eat five apples at one sitting. "I never concentrated



THE PLATE ABOVE HAS A HEALTHIER PORTION OF FOOD THAN THE PLATE ON THE RIGHT.

on how much I was eating," she says. "I was never really satisfied because I never sat down and thought about whether I was full."

Daniel Shaver, 18, a senior at St. Andrew's Sewanee School in Tennessee, sees portion-control issues in his school cafeteria. "It is quite common for me to see someone with three desserts in one lunchtime," he says. Self-restraint is even harder off campus, where kids are dishing out the cash themselves. "I'll go with my friends to a Chinese buffet nearby, and all of us, including me at times, eat a ton," Daniel says. "And that's because we feel like we're paying for it."

Vision Quest

Why do people finish all or most of the food on their plates, even when they are already full? First, "we eat with our eyes more than our stomachs," Young says. "We don't wait, we don't stop, and we don't listen to our internal cues."

That behavior

WORDS TO KNOW

Portion: The amount of a food for one person at one meal.

Sensible: Having or containing good sense or reason

is probably learned, says Karen Collins, a nutrition adviser to the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR). Toddlers and babies know when they've had enough. But by age 5, kids seem to lose that ability, partly because parents "reward children with a gold star for cleaning their plates," says Collins. And the habit persists into adulthood.

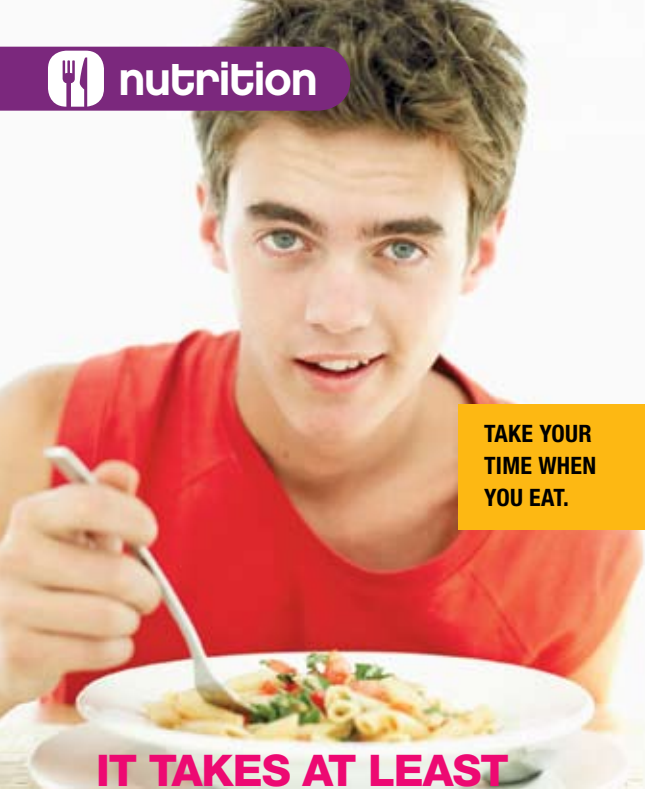
Second, Collins says that these days it is common to eat while doing another activity, like watching TV, surfing the Internet, chatting on the phone, or even driving a car. Under these circumstances people are distracted and don't realize when they are already full.

So how do you fill up on food, without overdoing it? Try these tips:

◆ **Rethink your food choices.** "Two thirds of your plate should be plant foods, like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans," Collins says. "And no more than one third should be animal protein, like beef, fish, or



BEWARE OF ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT BUFFETS.



TAKE YOUR TIME WHEN YOU EAT.

IT TAKES AT LEAST 20 MINUTES FOR YOUR BODY TO PROCESS THE SENSE OF FEELING SATISFIED. SO IF YOU WOLF DOWN YOUR MEAL IN LESS THAN THAT TIME, YOU RISK OVEREATING.

poultry.” Eggs, hummus, soy, tofu, or legumes can substitute for meat, according to Young.

◆ Aim for “satisfied,” not “full.”

If you have to take a deep breath and loosen your belt after a meal, you’re probably overeating. What we should be listening for, says Collins, is the subtle signal that says, “Oh, I’m not really hungry anymore”—which she describes as a whisper—rather than the signal that shouts out, “Gosh, I couldn’t eat another bite!”

◆ Eat more slowly. It takes at least 20 minutes for your body to process the sense of feeling satisfied. So if you wolf down your meal in less than that time, you risk overeating. To help you eat more slowly, try pacing yourself with the slowest eater at the table or using chopsticks instead of a fork, according to Brian Wansink,

author of *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think*.

◆ Avoid the “value” trap. Meals that promise a good value money-wise probably also offer way more food than should be eaten in one sitting. In his book, Wansink suggests splitting a “value” meal with a friend or saving half your food for later by putting it in a to-go container before you even start eating—either way, you get a better bang for your buck.

◆ Be independent.

Hanging around people with poor eating habits can influence how you eat. When possible, try to eat with friends who make good choices about food. But if your friends’ eating habits are at odds with yours, avoid criticizing them. “You can do your own thing without having it be a judgment on anyone else you’re with,” Collins says.

◆ Eat only when you’re hungry.

Often when teens overeat, it has little to do with being hungry, says Collins. It may have to do with being upset about something or just feeling bored. So next time you reach for that bag of chips, ask yourself, “Am I hungry, or do I just feel like eating?” If it’s the latter, instead of snacking try going for a walk, texting a friend, or listening to music to help sort through your feelings, Collins suggests.

—Veronica Majerol

test YOURSELF

Are these statements true or false? Answers are in the Teacher’s Edition.

1 Morgan McCorvey’s sense of how much she should eat in one sitting was so off that even when she ate healthy foods, she often ate too much at one time.

True **False**

2 By the time kids start attending elementary school, they have a strong understanding of what portion size of food they should be eating.

True **False**

3 Eating a meal quickly fills up your body faster and helps you to not eat too much food.

True **False**

4 The eating habits of people you see regularly, like your family and friends, can influence how much you eat.

True **False**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Why do you think food portions have grown so dramatically over the years? What might that trend reveal about American society in general?

2 Do you think the portions of foods you eat are healthy? How can you tell?

