

Young LR. *Portion Sizes in the American Food Supply: Issues and Implications* [dissertation]. New York, NY: New York University, 2000.

Dissertation Abstract (Publication No. 9955736)

Obesity is a major health problem in the U.S. and its prevalence is increasing. One reason for the increase in obesity may be that people are eating larger food portions and, therefore, more calories. This study has two purposes: to determine current portion sizes of foods that are major contributors of calories in U.S. diets and sold for immediate consumption, and to determine changes in these sizes during the past thirty years. Such foods include baked goods, beverages, hamburgers, steaks, chocolate, and pizza. This study compares the sizes of these foods to standard portion sizes developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for food composition tables and dietary guidance.

Portion sizes were obtained from manufacturers or measured directly. Changes in portion sizes were obtained from manufacturers, trade publications, newspapers, advertisements, and menus.

The study demonstrated that portion sizes increased over time; this trend began in the 1970s, increased in the early 1980s, and increased further in the late 1980s and 1990s, paralleling the increasing prevalence of overweight in the U.S. The study also demonstrated that current portion sizes are larger than standard portions developed by USDA. The mean weight of muffins (6.5 oz) was more than three times the weight of USDA's standards. The mean weight of cookies (4.0 oz) was eight times that of USDA's "medium" cookie. For most foods, the *smallest* size available was larger than USDA's standards. The smallest steak (6.0 oz) was at least twice the size of USDA's standard.

Such results indicate that the USDA should consider reevaluating its definitions of standard serving sizes and should update food guides and food composition tables to reflect current sizes. Finally, to prevent obesity rates from escalating further and to help overweight individuals lose weight, nutritionists should help consumers relate actual sizes of portions consumed to recommendations.

Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., R.D.
E-mail: lisa.young@nyu.edu

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