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## Portion control can help you survive the holiday calorie blitz

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By KIM PIERCE / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

With the holidays creeping up on us – that is, upon our hips and thighs – Lisa Young's *The Portion Teller* couldn't be more timely.

She nails how Americans have been persuaded to eat ever-increasing food portions that have nothing to do with healthy servings.

If you think you know the story, think again.

Sure, everyone knows portions are larger. But you may not realize how much larger, how insidious the process has been and how it affects what you eat. As the registered dietitian who has a doctorate in nutrition points out, you wouldn't eat five pieces of bread for breakfast. But when you grab a bagel or a muffin, you're consuming roughly the equivalent.

That's because no one, not even diet professionals, is good at estimating how much he or she really eats. The nutrition consultant who teaches at New York University conducted one study with dietitians who were shown restaurant food and asked to estimate the calories. None got it right, and some low-balled the actual number by more than half.

If dietitians can't tell how much food is on a plate, Dr. Young writes, how can the rest of us be expected to – especially in the face of the food industry's relentless drive to super-size just about everything?

"The foods we buy today," she writes, "are often two to three times, even *five times*, larger than when they were first introduced into the marketplace." And she cites examples:



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Common items can be used to help estimate portion sizes. Roll your mouse over each item on the plate to see what it represents.

In 1960, the common restaurant portion size for pasta was 1.5 cups. By 2000, it had doubled to 3 cups. Compare that with the half-cup ("32 strands of spaghetti") that constitutes a standard serving according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. A half-cup, she says, is about the *size of a half baseball*.

In 1984, the chocolate-chip cookie recipe on the back of a package of Nestle's Toll House semisweet morsels yielded 100 cookies. By 1987, it made only 60. The recipe didn't change, but the cookies nearly doubled in size.

Remember the shapely 6.5-ounce Coca Cola bottle from the '60s? By 2000, the standard soft-drink size was 20 ounces. 7-Eleven started out with 12- and 20-ounce sodas in the '70s. "By 1988, they were selling the 64-ounce Double Gulp, a half-gallon of soda marketed for one person."

What is worse, she writes, people tend to eat more when presented with larger portions. In one study, moviegoers ate 61 percent more popcorn when handed a larger container than a small one, even if the popcorn tasted stale.

And about that "French Paradox": Dr. Young cites research showing that although the French eat more fat than Americans, they consume less food overall. Among other findings, "meals served in Chinese restaurants in Philadelphia are 72 percent heftier than those served in Chinese restaurants in Paris."

Is it any wonder, then, that so many Americans are overeating, even those who think they are not? And the holiday season is especially challenging, with all those nibbles and sweets and office parties and sit-down spreads.

Once you get past the shock of the studies and stats, Dr. Young introduces some common-sense ways to accurately estimate how much you're putting in your mouth, whether it's holiday canapés or restaurant entrees. It's the deck-of-cards-equals-3-ounces-of-meat approach, but in greater and more useful detail.

A cup of food, she explains, is about the size of a baseball. A half-cup, the size of half a baseball. A fourth of a cup? Think golf ball. An ounce of cheese? Looks like four dice. By the time you finish this book, you'll never be so quick to wolf down a bagel or slab of salmon again.

Dr. Young also recasts standard government-issue serving recommendations in terms of these visuals. You not only learn to estimate how much food you're eating, but how it relates to dietary guidelines, such as those at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Web site [www.mypyramid.com](http://www.mypyramid.com).

With her "smartsizing" strategy, Dr. Young says you can throw out the notion of counting anything, whether it's calories, fat grams or carbs. Once you can accurately assess how much is really on your plate, you won't be as tempted to mindlessly overeat.

It's frankly a brilliant way to recast Americans' eating dysfunction, and the information is a super-size eye-opener.

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## MAKING SENSE OF PORTION SIZES

This plate shows some common foods and serving sizes that compare to everyday objects, to help you estimate how much you're eating. "For example," Lisa Young writes in *The Portion Teller*, "you may not be able to estimate the size of 3, 6, or 9 ounces of meat. But you can probably answer the question:

How many decks of cards are on my plate: 1, 2 or 3?"

**Deck of cards** = 3 ounces of meat, poultry or fish such as tuna or steak; roast beef is pictured

**Golf ball** = ¼cup, in this case beef gravy

**Computer mouse** = 1 medium potato; most baking potatoes are about twice this size

**4 dice** = 1 ounce cheese; an ounce of cheddar contains 114 calories

**Half a baseball** = ½cup, the green beans

**Postage stamp** = 1 teaspoon of butter or margarine

**Baseball** = 1 cup; you would eat more than a cup of greens in most salads

**Shot glass** = 2 ounces ( ¼ cup) of dressing; you would probably eat more greens with this much dressing, although 2 ounces of many dressings can contain upwards of 300 calories. You can use a golf ball or a shot glass to visualize this amount.



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The food on this plate corresponds to the serving sizes illustrated in the photo at the top of the story.

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