



PORTION DISTORTION

Supersized servings may be the #1 cause of obesity in the U.S.
Take our quiz to find your calorie IQ—and lose the weight you want.

BY ANNA ROUFOS

SOMETIMES, BIGGER IS BETTER. IN OUR OPINION, SALARIES, BATHTUBS and gym lockers should all be as gigantic as possible. But food? “As portion sizes have increased, so have rates of chronic disease,” notes Lisa Young, Ph.D., R.D., author of *The Portion Teller* (Broadway Books, 2005). Consider just how fattening the newer, larger portions can be. A bottle of Coke, for instance, used to be 6.5 ounces and just 80 calories. Compare that to the 64-ounce, 800-calorie Double Gulp from 7-Eleven. Gulp.

The problem is that few people really understand the difference between a portion and a serving. A serving is a standardized amount of food based on the number of calories it contains. A portion is the number of servings you put on your plate. “If you confuse the two, you

could easily overeat while trying to meet the recommended servings for all sorts of foods,” says Young.

To keep extra pounds—not to mention disease—at bay, test your portion savvy with these 19 eye-opening questions.

◀ How much popcorn is in this medium-size bucket?

About 16 cups. With butter, that can add up to around 1,000 calories—about half the daily needs of a moderately active 135-pound woman.

TRUE OR FALSE

A bigger portion always satisfies you more.

False. In a study conducted by Barbara Rolls, Ph.D., at Pennsylvania State University, subjects were offered different-size submarine sandwiches on four different days: 6-inch, 8-inch, 10-inch and 12-inch. When served the 12-inch sandwich compared with the 8-inch, women consumed an extra 74 calories, while men took in an additional 186.

“What was really surprising is that even though they were eating more, most subjects rated their fullness as the same, whether they ate the small, medium or larger portion,” says Rolls. “The extra food didn’t seem to register as, well, extra food.”

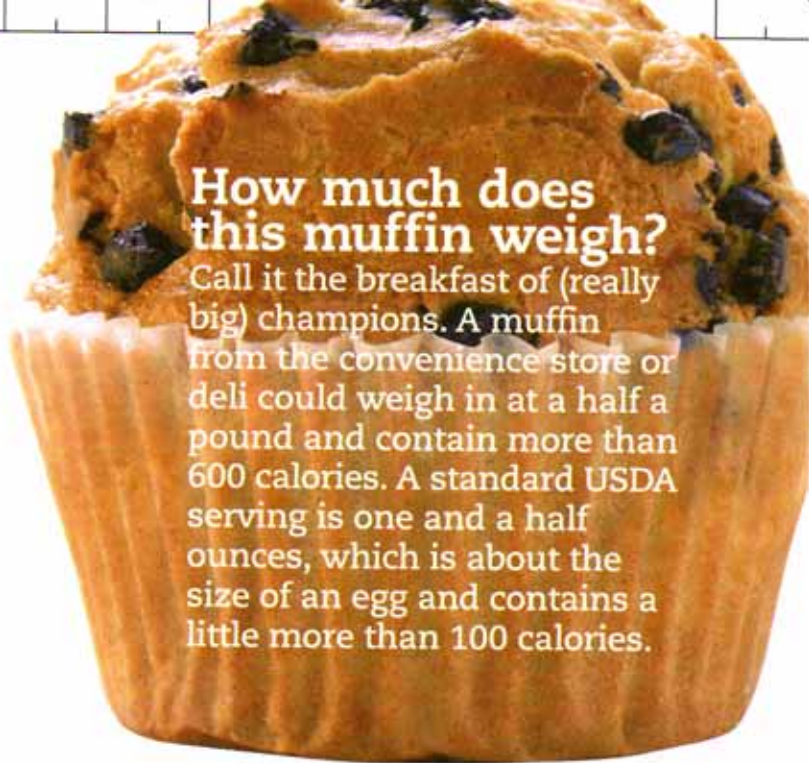
Taste determines how much you eat.

This one’s only partly true. In one study, moviegoers were given large buckets of 14-day-old popcorn. “They hated the flavor—but they kept eating it,” says lead researcher Brian Wansink, Ph.D. “People often say they overeat because the food is really good, but other factors are also to blame.” In this case, Wansink muses, it may have been the bigger bucket, which provides a visual cue that it’s appropriate to eat more. “Peer pressure and distraction may have also played a part,” says Wansink. If you’re engrossed in a movie or even just a conversation, it may take a few—or more—extra bites of food before you say, *yuck*.

TRUE/FALSE CONTINUED ▶

How many servings are in this 16-ounce container of orange juice?

It depends on whom you ask. The USDA Food Guide Pyramid says six ounces is a single serving, but the FDA, which sets standard serving amounts for food labeling, says one serving is eight ounces. It gets trickier. According to the FDA, any food weighing less than twice its standard serving amount may be labeled "one serving per container." That's why a 14-ounce carton of juice can be labeled as one "serving" and pack almost 200 calories. Our advice: Pour your own "individual" six-ounce glass of juice. (Math-challenged? That's three-quarters of a cup.)



How much does this muffin weigh?

Call it the breakfast of (really big) champions. A muffin from the convenience store or deli could weigh in at a half a pound and contain more than 600 calories. A standard USDA serving is one and a half ounces, which is about the size of an egg and contains a little more than 100 calories.

What's in a Portion?



Wendy's Mandarin Chicken Salad
630 calories/35 g fat



Subway Savory Turkey Breast & Ham sandwich
290 calories/5 g fat



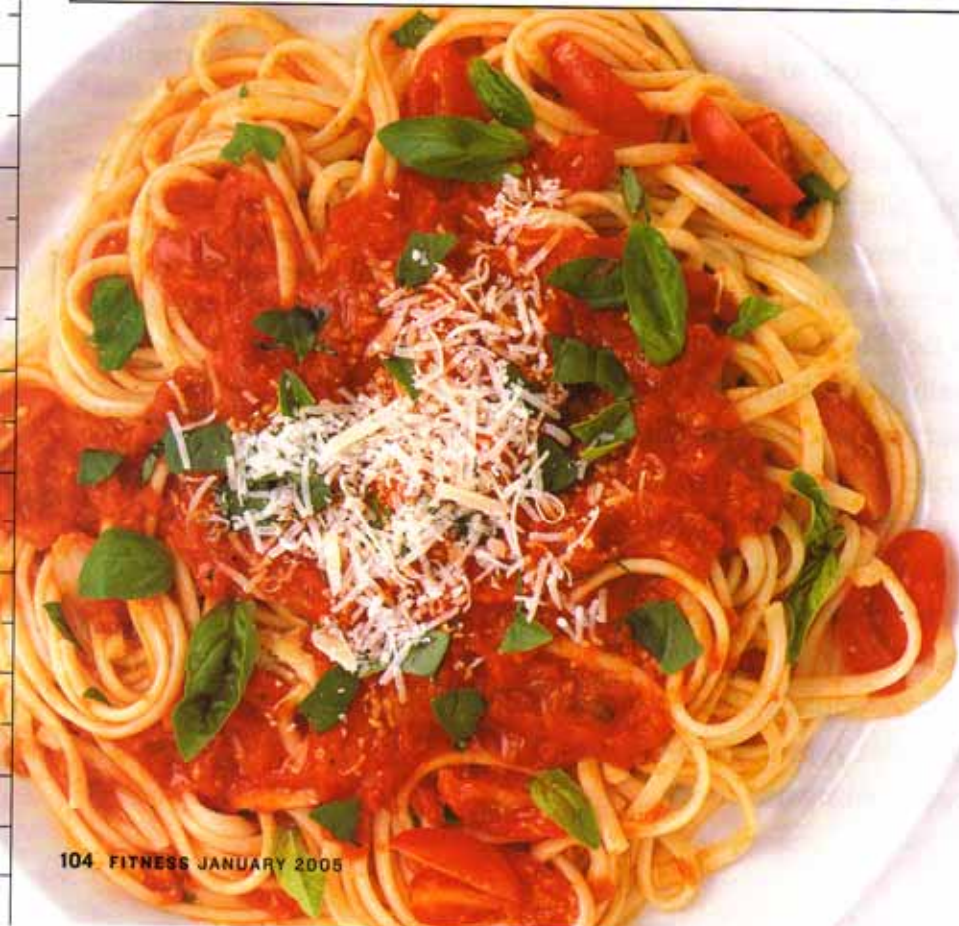
McDonald's Quarter Pounder with Cheese
540 calories/29 g fat

How much is the standard USDA serving of french fries?

ABOUT 10.

How many fries are in a Wendy's Great Biggie?

ABOUT 100, at 530 calories. Do yourself a favor and just order the small.



HOW MANY SERVINGS OF PASTA ARE ON THIS PLATE?

A dinner plate filled with pasta can easily contain four cups, or eight servings, according to the USDA Food Guide Pyramid, which recommends eating 6 to 11 servings of bread or grains per day. (At press time, the Food Guide Pyramid was under review.) "This is why some experts say that pasta makes us fat," says Young. "It's not the pasta itself, but the portions in which it's usually served. Many people can't conceptualize that in one meal, they may have consumed all of the bread or grain servings they need in a day."

OPENING PAGE: BURKE/TRIOLD PRODUCTIONS/GETTY IMAGES; THIS PAGE: ORANGE JUICE: OJARD PHOTO; MUFFIN: ALAMY IMAGES; WENDY'S: SUBWAY; McDONALD'S: PASTA: ANASTASSIOS MENTIS; FOOD STYLIST: LIZA JEANOW; OPPOSITE: MEASURING SPOONS: ENVISION; CEREAL: STOCARD/ISTOCKPHOTO; CHICKEN: CHICKEN; CHEESE: CHEESE; BUTTER: ARI FOODSTOCK.

Portion Cheat Sheet

THE FOOD	ONE SERVING EQUALS	SERVINGS IN A DAY (1,600 calories per day)
Fruit	1 medium piece or ½ cup chopped or cooked	2
Vegetables	1 cup raw leafy greens or ½ cup cooked	3
Breads and grains	1 slice or ½ cup cooked grains	6
Meat, pork, poultry, fish and beans	2 to 3 ounces, cooked, or ½ cup cooked beans	2
Dairy foods	2 cups milk or yogurt, 1½ ounces natural cheese (such as cheddar) or 2 ounces processed cheese (like American)	2 to 3

How much larger are most store-bought cookies compared with what experts recommend?

a. 50% b. 200% c. 700%

ANSWER: C

The recommended serving size for a cookie is half an ounce. In one study, Young found that individually wrapped cookies from a deli were almost four ounces, or 700 percent bigger, and contained around 400 to 500 calories each. The problem is that people are likely to eat the whole thing, no matter how big. (Ever tried leaving a third of a cookie behind? We have. It doesn't work.) Young suggests making them from scratch and using a half-ounce scoop to measure out the cookie dough.

What's the smartest way to get a handle on portions?

Get thee to a kitchenware store! On your list: measuring spoons and cups and a scale. When you see what you should eat, you'll understand the extent of your own portion distortion.



TRUE OR FALSE

The amount of food in a package influences how much you eat.

True. To test how the size of a bag affects intake, researchers served a group of people five different bags of potato chips, ranging in weight from 28 grams to 170, and asked them to eat directly from the bag. When they were served the largest package, women ate 18 percent more and men ate 37 percent more than when served the 85-gram package. But here's the kicker: When they were served a meal several hours later, female subjects didn't adjust their intake to compensate for having eaten chips.

When it comes to losing weight, what you eat is more important than how much.

False—even though most people believe this statement to be true, according to a survey conducted by the American Institute for Cancer Research. "The only thing that matters in weight loss is how many calories you take in and burn off. The bigger the portion, the more calories it contains," says Young. From a disease-fighting perspective, eating less fat and more fruits, vegetables and whole grains makes sense, but even eating too many healthy foods can increase your size. "The reality, however, is that these aren't the foods people tend to pig out on. There's too much fiber—you'll feel fuller before your calorie intake exceeds your needs." In other words, you won't be able to eat enough broccoli to make you fat.

MIX AND MATCH

The American Institute for Cancer Research asked people to estimate the standard USDA serving sizes for common foods. Sixty-one percent flunked. How portion-savvy are you?

MATCH THE FOOD TO ITS APPROPRIATE SERVING SIZE



Answers: 1F, 2E, 3C, 4B, 5D, 6A