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Same cookbook, more calories

What's the difference between a nine-inch apple pie made from a Joy of Cooking recipe in 1931 and 2006? Two apples, 1/4 cup sugar, 1 tbsp butter

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If you're counting calories, you may want to dust off your grandmother's edition of the *Joy of Cooking*. The average calorie count of some of the book's classic recipes rose 63 per cent between its 1936 and 2006 editions, according to new research.

"This is not just desserts, it's also main courses, salads, everything," says Brian Wansink, the executive director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, who led the research.

Dr. Wansink and his colleagues studied 18 recipes, including apple pie, corn muffins, sugar cookies, beef stroganoff and chili, which appear in all editions of the book (there have been several since its original 1931 publication). In 2006 the average calories per recipe was about 384, up from 268 in 1936.

There are two culprits: The use of more high-calorie ingredients such as cheese, meat and sugar, and growing portion size.

On average, a 2006 recipe had about one fewer serving (1.1) than in 1936. The nine-inch apple pie, for instance, used to serve eight; now it serves six. Serving sizes started to expand after the Second World War and continued growing through the 1950s and early 60s, says Dr. Wansink, but the biggest jump has been a 33.2-per-cent increase since 1996.

Another factor may be that households have shrunk over the years. Cookbooks may be responding to the tendency to feed fewer people with the same amount of food. "But it shouldn't be a license to eat," Dr. Wansink says.

As part of another study on portion size, New York University nutritionist Lisa Young published similar research in 2002, finding that identical *Joy of Cooking* brownie recipes yielded 30 brownies in 1975 and 16 brownies in 1997.

"They're twice the size," says Dr. Young, the author of *The Portion Teller Plan*. She speculates that the shift reflects an ongoing inflation of portion size in North America.

"Because portion sizes started to get big outside the home, the portions inside the home did, too," she says, adding that kitchen tools such as muffin and cake tins have also grown.

Home cooking, which many people consider healthier than eating out, should not escape the scrutiny of those aiming to stem the obesity epidemic, Dr. Wansink says.

"A lot of people vilify away-from-home eating at restaurants, chains and school cafeterias, but wait a minute," says Dr. Wansink, who is also director of the Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University and the author of *Mindless Eating*. "Are we orchestrating our own problems at home?"

Dr. Wansink's research, presented Wednesday in Washington, will appear in a paper in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* this spring.

While there are healthy cookbooks out there for guidance, the research highlights the role general cookbooks such as the *Joy of Cooking* can play in combatting the trend to large portions, says Mary McKenna, a registered dietitian and professor of nutrition at the University of New Brunswick.

But until authors scale back to Depression-era serving sizes, Dr. McKenna says, many families would do well to rethink attitudes toward eating at home.

"We have a tradition of more-equals-love, especially in this busy world," she says. "We have to try and convey that less-equals-love."