

Denver Post March 2002

## **Supersize not super wise, dietitians say** Growing portions mean Americans are eating more than ever

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**Monday, March 04, 2002** - Americans are living large and eating larger, according to a new survey.

Burger joints, convenience stores and even highbrow bistros are now offering portions up to seven times as big as government serving suggestions for a healthy diet, according to New York University food researchers.

While "supersize" has long been part of the national vocabulary, the NYU study made a new attempt to compare today's burgers, fries and pies to sizes offered up to 40 years ago.

The (sagging) bottom line:

Cooked pasta portions exceed federal standards by 480 percent. Steaks weigh in at 224 percent over what's healthy. What McDonald's called its "supersize" fries in 1998 is now merely "large," and the current "supersize" is a full ounce bigger. In recipes from the 1964 and 1997 editions of "The Joy of Cooking," the number of servings from identical ingredients has been cut dramatically so each family member can have more.

Of all the food types surveyed, only sliced white bread kept to its humble beginnings.

The total U.S. food supply provides each American 500 calories a day more now than in the 1970s, according to NYU dietitians Lisa Young and Marion Nestle. Average adults maintain weight with about 2,000 calories a day.

"People talk about how big things have gotten, but nobody got out the scale to find out how big," Young said. "It's clear there are more calories in the food supply."

Denver nutrition experts said the study, published in the American Journal of Public Health, puts solid numbers to an uneasy feeling that cleaning your plate is now a health risk.

"It does explain part of the reason obesity seems to be going up so much," said Joan Knoll, a nutrition teacher at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.

Westerners don't like the word "small," she said.

"If you look at our country, everything is big: TVs, cars, hamburgers," Knoll said. "People like that they get a lot of food for a little money."

Indeed, at most fast-food meccas, "small" is only in the fine print. At a central Denver Burger King, a "small" order of fries is mentioned in a nutrition brochure. But overhead on the public menu, they start at medium, go to large and end with "King" size, at 600 calories.

Knoll said many people who are dieting shouldn't have more than 1,500 calories in an entire day.

Bill McComber ate a large order of fries at an Arby's on Tuesday, although he said he usually goes with a regular.

"Sometimes I go with a supersize, but it's usually too much, and I don't eat the whole thing," he said. "My two teenagers always supersize. Every time."

Health officials worry further because more people are getting exposed to supersizes more often. Americans now eat out an average of 218 times a year, according to the National Restaurant Association. Restaurants now take 46 percent of our food money, up sharply from 25 percent in 1955.

Don't expect restaurants to now start bragging about shrinking portions.

"People do supersize, and it's more food than they can eat, but they continue to do it," said Don Boodel, owner of six Colorado McDonald's franchises. "And the profit is still in the fries and the drinks."

For increasingly circumference-challenged Americans, battling restaurant marketing ploys may require ploys of their own. Denver nutritionist Rita Cummings says one of her nightmares is an advertised 32-ounce steak. Steak size is better at 4 to 6 ounces - if it's bigger than a computer mouse, stop early, she says.

Knoll has her own trick: Take half home.

"Ask for the take-home box before you start eating."

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