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## The 100-Calorie Solution: Smaller Snacks May Not Lead to Smaller Waistlines *July 18, 2006; Page D1*

New 100-calorie snack foods are crowding store shelves, but the nutrition community remains skeptical about whether good health really comes in these small packages.

After years of super-sizing our food, food companies now see a marketing opportunity in teaching us portion control. **Kellogg's** Keebler cookies, **Procter & Gamble's** Pringles potato chips and **Kraft Foods'** Nabisco crackers and cookies have all introduced 100-calorie snack packs for calorie-counting consumers.

There is lots of scientific evidence that putting smaller portions in front of us will help us eat less in one sitting, so many nutritionists like the idea that food companies are scaling down portion size. However, what isn't clear is whether many consumers will be satisfied with the 100-calorie snacks. One concern is that the highly processed starchy and sugary foods will trigger more cravings and prompt consumers to reach for a second or even third snack pack.

"They do help some people contain a snack habit," says Susan B. Roberts, head of the energy metabolism laboratory at the Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition in Boston. But for others, "One hundred calories of this kind of food just isn't enough and they end up opening another or several packs."

Nutritionists say there is nothing nutritionally significant about the 100-calorie threshold other than it is an easy-to-remember number. It also doesn't take a lot of time or effort to burn off 100 calories. A 175-pound person would expend about 100 calories doing 20 minutes of housework. A 65-pound child would burn off 100 calories with a half-hour of outdoor play such as soccer.

The biggest benefit of the 100-calorie foods is they help teach portion control. Studies show that big portions tend to prompt people to overeat without realizing it. In April, the Journal of the American Dietetic Association published research from Pennsylvania State University researchers who tested various portion sizes on 32 adults over two weeks. The researchers gave the participants the same foods, but varied the portion sizes of the foods and beverages served. Sometimes a meal would be

a standard portion, some meals were 50% larger and some were twice as big.

What was clear is that large portions seemed to interfere with the diner's own internal satiety signals, causing them to eat far more than they would have otherwise. Although the diners didn't always clear their plates when the portions were very large, they ended up eating a greater number of calories than they otherwise would have. Increasing the portion by 50%, prompted diners to eat 16% more calories. When twice as much food was put on their plate, the diners ate 26% more calories. A doubling of portion size translated into an extra 530 calories a day -- or about a pound a week -- for women; and 812 calories a day -- or about 1.5 pounds a week -- for men.

One advantage of the portion-control packaging is that it makes it clear how much we have been overeating snacks. The packs contain just a handful of chips or cookies. To give the sense of more food, some manufacturers fill the packs with mini versions of standard foods. For instance, normally you could eat two Keebler Fudge Stripe cookies for 100 calories. A 100-calorie bag of the mini version contains about 11 bite-size cookies.

Nutritionists say the 100-calorie packs may be a good way to teach children about what an appropriate portion of chips or cookies really looks like. But one problem is that the 100-calorie bags aren't filled with particularly healthful foods. As a result, parents should use them sparingly, substituting instead more healthful snacks like a piece of fruit, a handful of raisins or peanut butter and crackers.

The biggest downside of the 100-calorie snack trend is cost. Even though consumers are getting smaller portions, the food makers are charging a lot more for the convenient packaging. For instance, five 100-calorie snack packs of Pepperidge Farm Flavor-blasted Goldfish cost \$2.99 -- that is about 83 cents an ounce. A regular 6.6-ounce bag of Goldfish costs \$1.99 or about 30 cents an ounce.

"In a sense, we are paying for someone else to control our portions," says **Lisa Young**, a New York University nutritionist. "It would be best if we can do it ourselves, but since we have such a hard time, this trend is the next best thing."

Whether the 100-calorie snacks are a good idea depends on the consumer's eating habits, cravings and self-control, says Dr. Roberts of Tufts. "Whether 100 calories is really a magic number or whether 120 or 150 or 80 would be better, I don't know," she says. "Magic in this case would mean the minimum somebody could be happy with without opening a second bag."

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