

Portion Perspective from the Inside Out

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People often find it difficult to control the amount of food they consume each day or even at each meal. Our society often doesn't help the situation as restaurants bring you platters of food rather than plates, enticing over-consumption of food with oversized food portions. These mega-meals can lead to sluggishness, guilt and eventual weight gain. There are many factors that trigger our urge to eat. The sight of food, the thought of food, the sound of food being prepared or the time of day often determines when, what and how much we eat. These triggers are considered external factors or reasons why we eat what we eat. Many believe the ability to control food intake is a "will-power" issue aimed solely at these external factors. But there are internal factors that affect your food consumption as well. Understanding these factors can help control how much you eat.



stretched on a repeated basis, its ability to retract to its normal size becomes less and the size of the stomach enlarges. Once the stomach is used to a high degree of stretching, the feeling of fullness can only occur by continually consuming larger portions of food.

Does your meal size match what you want your stomach size to be?

Nutritious meals should include foods from all food groups. To avoid overconsumption, each portion of food should be a reasonable amount to assure variety within each meal. Over time learning correct portions of food becomes as simple as "eye-balling" the amount. Measuring or weighing each portion is the most accurate and highly recommended if you have never attempted to control food portions.

Let's get to the guts of the matter, literally!

Your stomach when empty is about the size of your fist and holds only about 50 milliliters of fluids. The stomach is a muscle, in fact one of the strongest muscles in your body, and for a very important reason. The stomach breaks down all foods into a liquid form by squeezing and contracting on a rhythmic basis when food is present. Because it is a muscle, it also has the ability to stretch and will stretch to hold up to 1 to 1.5 liters of food in liquid form. As the stomach slowly empties, generally 2-4 hours following a complete meal, it will return to its normal size.

Like all other muscles in your body, the stomach muscle can be stretched beyond its capacity to accommodate larger amounts of food. However, if



Serving Size Examples

- 1/2 cup of vegetables = the size of a light bulb
- 1 Slice of bread = the size of a CD case
- 3 ounces of cooked meat, fish or poultry = the size of a deck of cards
- 1 medium piece of fruit = the size of a baseball
- 1 small baked potato = the size of a computer mouse
- 2 tablespoons of peanut butter = the size of a golf ball
- 1 medium bagel = the size of a hockey puck
- 1 ounce of cheese = the size of four dice
- 1 teaspoon of margarine = the size of the tip of your thumb to the first joint
- 1 cup of pasta = the size of a tennis ball

If you wish to change your eating habits, start slowly by controlling your food portions on the outside to affect your body on the inside. It will take time for your stomach muscle to return to its normal size. But once you have accomplished this, controlling your food portions will become easier!