

# Best to give the big serve a big swerve

What's good and what's not? Conflicting advice on nutrition makes healthy eating harder. But it doesn't have to be difficult. This week *The Courier-Mail* explores simple ways to a better life.

## Paddy Hintz

THE battle against obesity is struggling to overcome four decades of cultural conditioning which has taught us to eat too much.

The phenomenon is called portion distortion.

Upsizing in takeaway foods, bigger portion sizes for food products and even bigger dinner plate sizes sold at home-ware stores, as well as rising serving sizes in cookbooks, indicate the extent of the problem.

"The trouble is we're very impressed by what we think is value for money," author and dietitian Amanda Clark said.

"The more you get for your money, the better you feel, that is part of the problem.

"When you look at the cost of manufacturing a food product, the biggest cost comes from packaging and marketing. So

increasing the portion size does not cost that much more at all for the manufacturer."

However, while the food producer did not carry the cost of the upsizing trend, the consumer did in terms of weight gain and the rising cost of health provision for a population battling weight-related issues.

Ms Clark said an upsized meal deal at a fast-food chain from a burger, drink and fries, to a burger, a large drink and large fries, increased the cost by



16 per cent but the calorie count increased by 50 per cent.

Gold Coast mother of two children under four Tara-Lee Burke, 42, has lost seven of her target 10kg by simply learning about portion control.

"The biggest thing for me is that it has been such a lifestyle change and that was something that I thought would be a real challenge, but it hasn't been," Mrs Burke said.

"I now know to go to the rolled oats jar and just take out a handful for breakfast. I don't have to measure out 150 ml of milk for my breakfast any more because I know how much that is," she said.

Queensland chief executive of Diabetes Australia Michelle Trute said most consumers would not realise average serving sizes of their meals had doubled since the 1970s.

"A major player in our battle with the scales has been the big increase in portion sizes over the past 40 years and we are losing the battle because we think bigger and more is best," Ms Trute said.

In the past 25 years, the rate of diabetes in the population

has increased 250 per cent and diabetes experts say 60 per cent of the diabetes burden is due to people being overweight and not exercising.

"Over the next three decades, diabetes expenditure is projected to increase 400 per cent compared with an average 27 per cent increase in total health costs," Ms Trute said.

Brisbane-based dietitian Julie Gilbert said dinner plate sizes used at home had increased from an average 25cm in diameter in the 1970s to a current average size of 30cm.

"And people just feel the need to fill them," she said.

Ms Clark said one international study looked at cookbooks in the 1970s which had recipes recommended to serve six people. The same recipes in the present era are now recommended to feed four.

The phenomenon was the biggest problem facing Ms Clark and her colleagues at her Gold Coast practice.

"The trouble is we're all eating too much of everything. I see plenty of people who have really healthy diets but they are having too much of everything."



**WINNING THE BATTLE:** Tara-Lee Burke, who has recently lost 7kg, says losing weight is easy if you reduce your portion sizes.

**Picture:** Luke Marsden

## Diet tips

### To lose weight

Women and inactive teens should consume no more than 1300 calories a day, men and active teens should consume 1600 calories.

### To maintain weight

Women and inactive teens should consume 1800 calories a day, men and active teens should consume 2200 calories.

### Breakfast 300-500 calories

Everyday breakfast example: 1 slice multigrain bread, 130g baked beans, 1 hot skim milk

drink, 200ml

### Lunch 350 calories

Occasional lunch example: 1 battered fish fillet (15cm long) + 3 chips

### Dinner 350 calories

Everyday dinner example: 90g roast meat, 100g roast vegetables plus 1½ cups fresh vegetables

### Everyday snack examples 100 calories each

Leda low fat baked fruit filled bars 35g  
Nestle Milo Bar  
Weight Watchers Apple Crumble, 40g  
Be Natural Trail bars, 32g