

# portions perfect

Ever cooked a recipe meant for four people, only to polish it off with your partner? Portion control is one of the most important factors in weight loss. **Amber Wilson** investigates what constitutes a 'serving size', and how we can best count our calories

"Would you like to upsize your meal for an extra \$1?" We've all been asked that question when we've been indulging in 'sometimes' foods at our local fast food outlet. It may sound like a bargain, but how much is it really costing you in terms of your health and your weight?

Unfortunately, it's no longer just McDonald's or KFC who are expanding our plates – and our waists. Over the past few decades, portion sizes have grown exponentially. In the 1970s, a 'slice' usually referred to about an eighth or tenth of an entire pizza, pie or cake. In 2010, for many of us a 'slice' has become anywhere up to a quarter of the entire product.

Ice cream used to be served up in a petit parfait glass – now you're more likely to indulge in a large bowl, complete with chocolate sauce and cream. This steady growth in portion size is one of the main factors in the ever-increasing levels of obesity in Australian society.

## Serve up the right size

According to Amanda Clark, dietitian and author of *Portion Perfection – A visual weight control plan*, on average we're all gaining a few kilograms every year thanks to overeating.

"The main times that we overeat are when we eat out, when we eat from a large packet, when we eat from buffets and when we consume alcohol with food," she says. "The average dessert is about 2100kJ (such



Over the past few decades, portion sizes have grown in line with our waistlines. In the 1970s, a 'slice' referred to an eighth or tenth of a pizza, whereas today it can mean anything up to a quarter of a pizza.



## nutrition

as a Muffin Break muffin), but we can only really metabolise about 840kJ for supper or dessert."

Part of what makes eating sensible portion sizes so difficult is that there's no standardisation in the food products we buy, Clark says.

"The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating defines serve sizes for basic foods, such as two slices of bread or one piece of fruit," she says. "There is no standardisation, however, for a serving size in general. Food manufacturers make their own decisions about what constitutes a serve. Sometimes these aren't even consistent in-house.

"For example, Coca-Cola lists its 200ml can of coke as one serve, its 450ml bottle as one serve, its 600ml bottle as one serve, but its one-litre bottle as four serves. We need standardisation."

So why are we all digging into the supersize options these days?

"We like value for money," Clark says. "Plus, when we're hungry, we tend to overestimate how much food it will take to satisfy us. What's more, we don't like to leave food on the plate or in the packet."

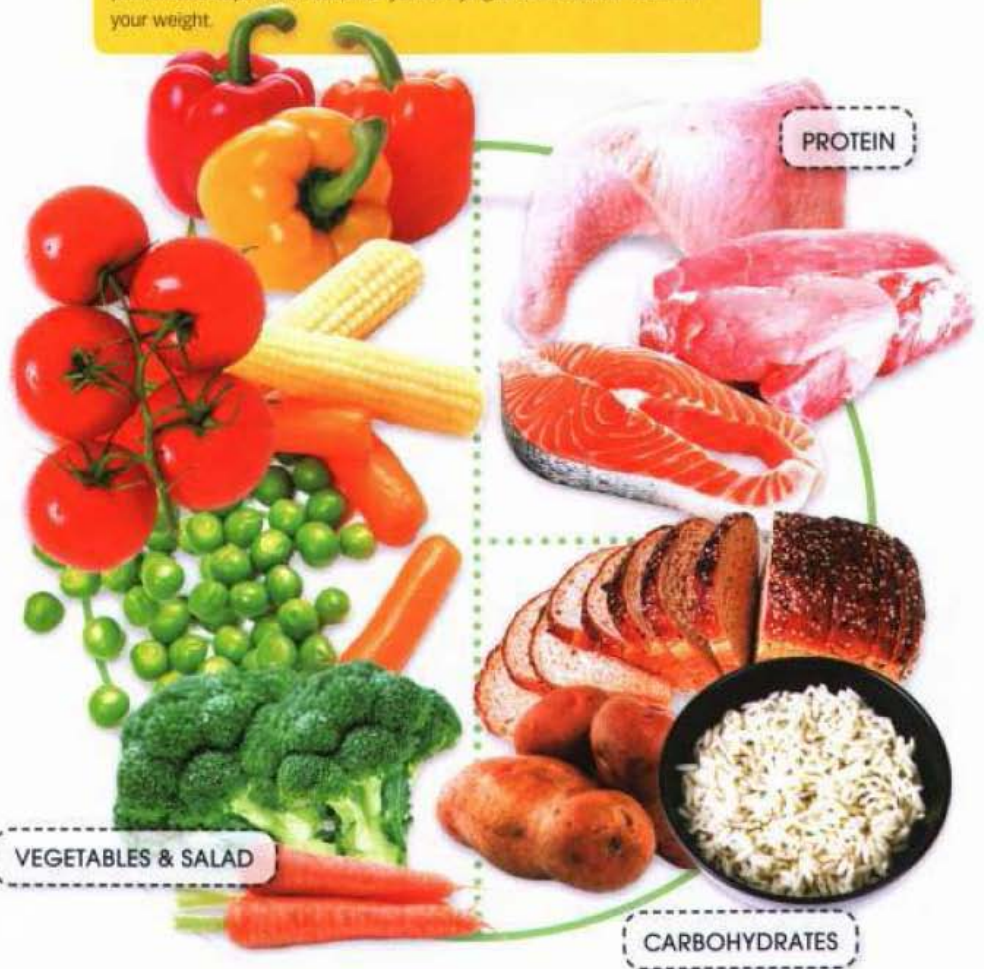
### An eye for portions

Weight and fitness-conscious people need to start looking at the portion sizes of their food, and weigh up if that amount is too small, too big or just right. Clark says there are a few tricks we can follow when estimating the calories in a given dish. A meal should ideally contain 1200 to 2300kJ, while a snack should contain 400 to 800kJ.

"The concept of the 'portion perfection plate' (included in my weight-loss plan) is that it's sized so if you just fill the base of your plate, 2cm deep, with one quarter protein, one quarter carbohydrate and one half salad or other vegetables, you have the

### The portion perfection plate

For a well-proportioned meal, fill your plate 2cm high – half with vegetables, one quarter with protein and one quarter with carbohydrates. Your total portion size depends on whether you're trying to shed kilos or maintain your weight.



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right amount for a woman to lose weight," she says.

"If you fill out to the edge in the same manner you have 1890kJ, which is the right amount for women to maintain weight, or for men to lose weight. It's really

only when you're a man aiming to maintain weight that there is room for second courses."

You can apply the same concept at home, or at a restaurant, by assessing the quantity of low-starch vegetables,

and eat half a plate's worth of those. Eat 2cm deep of the remainder of the meal.

### Watch those proportions

While it's important to look at portion size, equally important is to make sure we've got the right proportions of fats, carbohydrates and proteins to make sure we're fuelling our bodies properly and getting all the nutrients we need.

"The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating gives the right amounts for weight maintenance," Clark says. "At a minimum, we should be eating two pieces of fruit, two serves of dairy, four serves of bread or cereal, 120g

### Top tips for controlling portion size

- Know how many calories are right for you.
- Make sure half your plate is always filled with low-starch vegetables, or is empty if there aren't any vegies available.
- Buy products that are packaged in single serves.
- Eat three meals and three snacks each day – don't allow yourself to get overly hungry.
- Eat slowly, pay attention and enjoy.

meat or  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup legumes,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  cups vegetables and 3 tsp oil."

### A process of retraining

Training ourselves to eat smaller portions starts with eating less.

"The less you eat, the less you want," Clark says. "In the meantime, the technique of 'conscious eating' is helpful. It's about being in the moment, noticing all the attributes of the food you've eaten. Before putting anything in your mouth, take a good look at the appearance and the amount of food you're about to eat, and contemplate its suitability.

"Notice the variety in colour and texture you have in front of you, and smell the food,

noticing the freshness and which components are most aromatic. Then with every mouthful, notice the texture, the temperature and identify the flavours. Move it around your tongue, and basically pretend you're a food critic."

*Amanda Clark is a dietitian and author of Portion Perfection – A visual weight control plan, a guide that shows you exactly the right amount to eat if you want to lose or maintain weight. Visit [www.portionperfection.com.au](http://www.portionperfection.com.au) ✨*

