

Perfect Portion Control

We spoke to author of Portion Perfection, dietitian Amanda Clark to gain some expert advice on calorie counting and portion control

So Amanda, how can we start to regain control?

You can regain control of your calorie intake by being aware of exactly how much is right to eat and by being more selective in the products you buy.

Knowing your correct serving size can help you make more informed decisions about how much to eat, and keep you on track if you want to lose or maintain weight.

What has happened to portion sizes in Australia over the past 20 years or so?

Nutrition surveys over the past 20 years have clearly established we are eating more calories than we used to. For instance, 20 years ago, a Mars Bar weighed 30 grams and contained 135 calories, and we were happy. Today the king size weighs 80 grams and contains 365 calories.

What was once acceptable as a snack is now approaching the calories in an entire meal.

Is cutting back on portion sizes the simplest way to lose weight?

For the most part we haven't noticed our portion sizes have increased over the years and there is good evidence we wouldn't notice if they decreased again.

Can you be a healthy weight and indulge in higher calorie foods now and then?

Yes, it is possible to eat out regularly and enjoy calorie-dense foods occasionally without gaining weight. The key is getting your portion sizes right to meet your calorie needs. When you know how much is right to eat, you can feel

less guilty about treating yourself to your favourite foods.

Nobody wants to eat less or feel deprived of what they enjoy – that's why diets don't work, right?

That's exactly right. The best diet is the one you don't even know you're on and that lets you eat what you want. The fact is we're no more satisfied when we eat larger portions and research has proven we can eat 20 per cent more or less without even realising it.

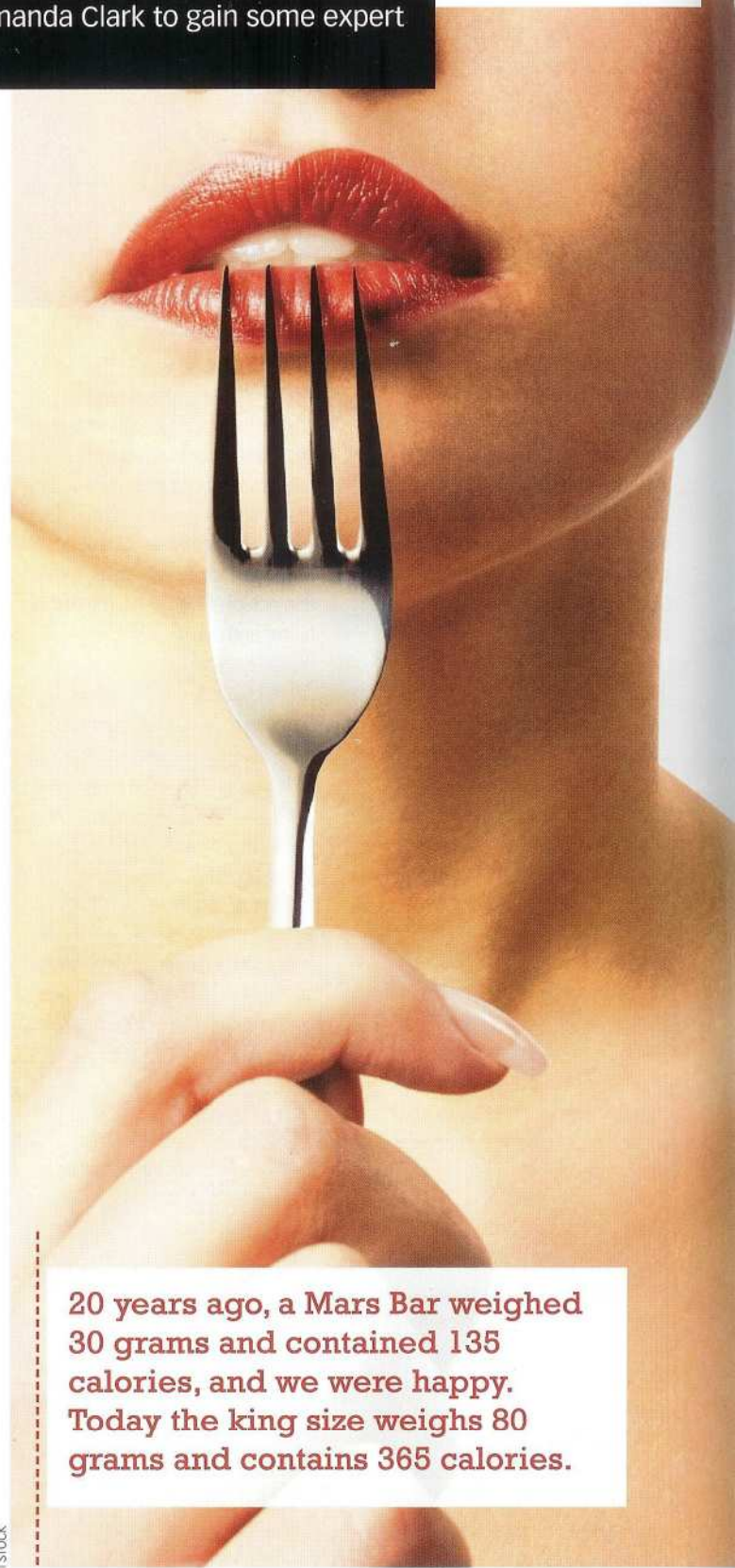
So what's the secret to being able to lose weight and still eat what you want?

It's knowing the right portion sizes for you and taking good notice of everything you eat so you feel satisfied in your head as well as your stomach.

How much do external factors like food marketing and packaging influence how much we eat?

Greatly... the fact is we are all unaware of the subtle ways our environment makes us eat more.

An American study found even nutrition experts can be fooled into eating more without knowing it. 85 nutritional science professors and PhD students were invited to an ice-cream party where they were given either medium or large sized bowls and either medium or large ice-cream scoops. Unknowingly, those with the biggest bowls ate just over 30 per cent more ice cream than those with the smaller bowls. And those given the larger scoops and larger bowls ate 57 per cent more than those with the smaller bowls and scoops. So even



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the most wary among us can be tricked into eating more!

In New York, a new law is forcing chain restaurants to show the calorie count of each food on display in the same size and font

as the price. Do you think Australia will follow suit?

This law was introduced to help people understand how many calories they are eating so they think twice about mindlessly

How can we eat less and trick ourselves into feeling satisfied?

When you sit down to a meal, think about its:

Presentation – does it look appealing and what quantity do you see? Does it match how hungry you are feeling? This will help you register when you are half-finished and when the meal has ended so you can move onto something else.

Variety – what variety of colours, textures and types of foods do you see?

Aroma – smell the food. What do you notice? Does it smell fresh? Appetising? Can you smell all the components of the meal or only some?

As you eat the food, notice the texture – is it smooth? Grainy? Tough? Tender?

Also think about the temperature – is it ideal for that food? Could it be warmer or cooler? At which point does it cease to be the ideal temperature?

Savour the flavours – what ingredients can you taste? Imagine if you didn't see what you put in your mouth. Could you identify it from its taste and texture?

- Slow yourself right down and enjoy the meal.
- Downsize your plate, bowl,

glass, package, container, serving spoon, etc. As the size of your dishes increases, so does the amount you eat. You can make yourself think you are consuming more from tall, slender glasses and smaller plates and bowls.

- Never eat straight from a multi-serve packet or container – always serve the amount you intend to eat into a separate dish or cup, or buy single portion-sized packs. The bigger the packet you serve from, the more you tend to eat.
- Find out the right snack size for you and learn how to count calories by the hundreds, for example – 100 calories in each slice of bread, 100 calories in one banana, 100 calories in each 200ml glass of fruit juice or skim milk, etc.
- Keep variety of higher calorie foods to a minimum and increase the different kinds of healthy foods to choose from. The more variety you see, the more you will eat.
- Thinking about what you just ate can decrease your appetite. With every mouthful, check with your stomach to see whether you really want to be eating this right now.

eating energy-dense foods.

Australia generally tends to follow trends in the USA. We are just starting to see snack foods packaged in 100 calorie serving sizes here and that is already very popular in the US.

What else would be good to see happen in Australia to address our weight-related problems?

Consumers can demand proper portion sizes by favouring products in appropriate-sized portion packs, like the new 100 calorie snacks.

Food companies could list calories as well as kilojoules on labels because they are smaller and easier to add and multiply.

Non-portion packages could describe their serving sizes in more meaningful terms. Most cereals list serves in grams, but most people don't weigh cereal and could better judge the volume by the amount in a cup size.

Food Standards Australia and New Zealand could set some guidelines regarding recommended serving sizes. Currently food companies make their own decisions about what is a single serve and this may be unrealistic. For instance, flavoured milk bottles sold at take-away outlets are obviously going to be consumed in one go, but list 2.5 serves per package. This makes the nutrition information per serve look more appealing than it really is.

Amanda's top tips

- When you know what equates to your ideal serving size for meals and snacks, you can make better choices every day and still enjoy the foods you love occasionally.
- It is possible to eat what you want and eat out regularly without gaining weight.
- You can learn how to trick yourself into eating less by knowing the hidden overeating traps to avoid.
- We are all unconsciously

persuaded to eat more because of external factors like marketing, packaging, the size of our dishes and our environment.

- For the most part we haven't noticed our portion sizes have increased over the years and there is good evidence we wouldn't notice if they decreased again.

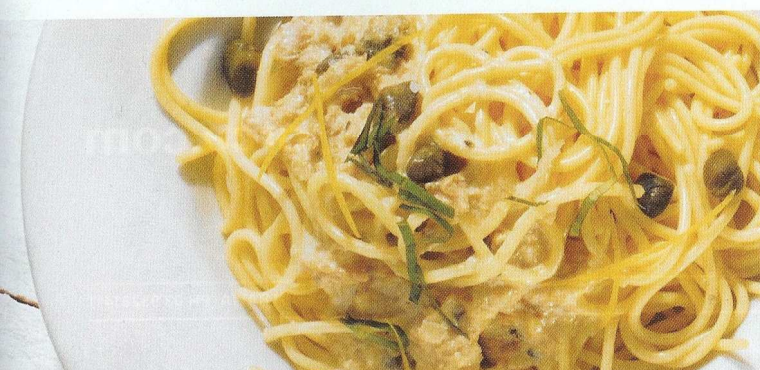
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