

The size of your plate and your weight

Portion sizes are the key to eating smarter. *by Karen Giles-Smith*

No doubt you've heard that portion sizes have dramatically increased over the past 40 years. In the 1970s, to get an edge on the competition, restaurants and food manufacturers started selling more food for less money. Well, we took the bait...and ate. Research shows we'll eat much more when we're confronted with larger portions.

But portion sizes aren't the only thing that's been inflated. The size of glasses, plates and bowls has also ballooned. According to Brian Wansink, director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab at Cornell University and author of the book, *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More than We Think*, the surface area of the average dinner plate has increased 36 percent since 1960.

Does it matter? Specifically, does the perimeter of your plate affect your weight? *Healthy & Fit Magazine* checked in with two registered dietitians for their opinion. Peggy Crum, BS, RD, is a



consultant/nutritionist for the Health4U program at Michigan State University and a pediatric nutritionist with MSU's Department of Pediatrics and Human Development. Jim Painter, PhD, RD, is a professor and chair of the School of Family and Consumer Sciences at Eastern Illinois University and a researcher in the area of portion size and food psychology. Although Crum and Painter have different perspectives on the issue, they both agree on the bottom line.

Crum is a firm believer in the body's ability to appropriately regulate food intake. "You have internal regulators you

can trust to guide you in your food selections and amounts," she says. The key is to trust your eating and your body: When you choose from a variety of healthful food and cue into your feelings of hunger and fullness, your body will naturally reach a weight that's right for you. Control tactics, such as manipulating plate size, undermines a person's confidence in their ability to feed themselves well. And the control tactics backfire. "Consider the 'eat off smaller plates' advice to be one of many control messages aimed at getting you to eat less than your body needs or desires," says Crum. "When a person is underfed on one occasion, he or she will eat more on another occasion, no matter what tactic is used to encourage decreased intake."

Crum cites a 2007 study by Rolls and colleagues at Pennsylvania State University that showed eating from a smaller plate did not cause people to eat less, whether it was a self-served main course, a pre-plated main course or a meal self-served at a buffet. Painter's research indicates that, in

Continued on page 23.



Diabetes Forum in celebration of American Diabetes Month

This forum is free to the public



Keynote Speaker: Dr. Erica Magers
Family Practice Physician, Charlotte Medical Group
Medical director, HGB Diabetes Education Program

HGB clinical specialists and diabetes product companies also on hand to answer questions about caring for your diabetes.



www.hgbhealth.com

November 10, 2009

6 to 8 p.m.

Trumley Education Center

(2nd floor of hospital)

Can't come to the forum? Call Melanie Shehan, R.D., for answers to your diabetes questions. 517-543-1050, extension 1249

Continued from page 21.

certain situations, the size of the plate or bowl may make a difference in the amount people eat on that particular occasion. For example, if people are given a small plate, serve themselves, and know that their intake isn't restricted (*they can have more food later if they're still hungry*), they will take less food than if they were given a large plate. However, it's not known whether or not eating from a smaller plate at every meal leads to long-term change in consumption and weight.

Based on anecdotal evidence, Painter believes that if people use smaller plates, bowls and cups when eating at home, they will eat less and feel satisfied. But Painter says portion size is only one piece of the weight management puzzle. "The most powerful weight management strategy is to keep track of what you eat," says Painter. "Not a detailed record of amounts, calories, or fat—everyone quits when they have to track details. Just make one commitment: Write down what you eat before you put it in your mouth. That's the only thing that really works: When you make the decision if you want to eat it or not at the moment of consumption." Another technique

relates to food visibility. Painter suggests making the food you'd like to eat more of (fruits and vegetables) visible by putting it in plain sight, and making the food you'd like to eat less of (candy, pop, chips, etc.) less visible by storing it behind closed doors.

Painter is quick to clarify that these techniques are not about restricting eating. "It's calorie reduction without restriction. When you restrict food, you feel deprived and food consumes you—you end up dreaming about food."

The bottom line is that restrictive eating doesn't do you any favors. You may want to try downsizing your dinnerware, but if you feel manipulated, ditch it. "Dieting or restricting in one form or another has been around for decades," says Crum. "With all the manipulation of the measuring sticks, it's hard to know, but it's reported that the population has gotten fatter. Restricting food is not helpful in getting people to be less fat. Making people feel insecure about their food [choices] and their ability to eat is not helpful."

.....
Karen Giles-Smith, MS, RD, is a registered dietitian and freelance writer based in Mason, Michigan. Visit her Web site at: www.TheWellnessWriter.com

The Experts Take on Portion Plates

Plates like The Portion Plate (theportionplate.com) and The Diet Plate (dietplate.us) are divided into sections to guide portion size selection. Research on the effectiveness of portion plates is very limited. A 2007 study by Pederson and colleagues published in the Archives of Internal Medicine found that diabetic, obese subjects on a calorie controlled diet who used the portion plate lost more weight.

Healthy & Fit Magazine asked dietitians Peggy Crum and Jim Painter to weigh in. Painter recommends the portion plate as a teaching tool to help people get a grasp on portion size in order to gauge how much they're eating. The trick, Painter says, is to focus on what/how much you can eat, instead of what you shouldn't eat. He also points out that portion plates won't work at a buffet because thoughts of "loading up to get your money's worth" override the visual cues of the portion plate. Crum believes portion plates aren't helpful; in fact, harm may be done. She believes that "appropriate portion size is an individually unique amount," and rather than worry about portion size, people should embrace the ability to eat a satisfying amount of food. "One aspect of satiety comes from the visual presentation of food in an attractive way," says Crum. "Divided plates with measuring device decals do not enhance the visual appeal of a meal."

The Beauty of Creative Wellness ...is that it will bring you Peace.

Ever wonder if there was a place you could go to feel peace? A place to escape the hustle and horns, constant chatter of cute kids or co-workers, or just a nagging pain. That place is Creative Wellness.

Whether the peace you seek is from an old pain you know well or a newly found problem, we have practitioners to help you on your quest. We offer a dozen types of massage, varying techniques in chiropractic care and the age old art of acupuncture. If classes are what you seek, we have meditation, yoga, tai chi, nia, pilates and more.

Give the gift of peace to someone you care about.



www.CreativeWellness.net

517-351-9240 | 2025 Abbot Road, Suite 200 | East Lansing, MI 48823

Online gift certificates available. Open 7 days a week.

