

FITNESS NUTRITION 101 SERIES: PORTION CONTROL

Nate Miyaki

There are many reasons for the health and obesity epidemic that currently plagues the American public. We can point the finger at numerous bad habits that have become the normal way of life for most of us. We don't exercise, we spend too many hours sitting at a desk, we're overstressed, we eat too much sugar, trans fat, fried foods, refined foods, etc. However, I believe the biggest contributing factor to our health and body composition problems is our glaring lack of portion control.

We are the land of the super-sized. Everywhere you go restaurants and retailers compete to satisfy the public's perception that more is better. What's one of the first compliments we give to restaurants? Good food -- nah who really cares about that? But dude, the portion sizes were huge -- that place is awesome!

Extra large, king size, two-for-one, free refills, all-you-can-eat, open bar, these are all American marketing creations that appeal to our inherent desire to over-consume. You can get a 32oz steak, a 64oz soda, a triple cheeseburger, a 2lb burrito, and a 5lb bag of chips. C'mon, who the hell really needs to drink 64oz of soda? In a land of entitlement and overindulgence, we have an immense lack of self-control.

If you look at any of the other articles in the Fitness Nutrition 101 Series, you can see that "fitness eating" is in direct opposition to this free-for-all food party where everyone is invited. Fitness nutrition is all about details -- exact portions of each macronutrient down to the gram. It's about a well thought-out plan based on science that gives our bodies exactly what it needs without any excess. The person following a typical American diet lives on the other side of excess.

How do you make the transition from a "super-sizer" to a "just-the-right-sizer"? The answer is to measure your food so you know exactly what is going into your body. This is blasphemy to anyone outside of the fitness world. My ears are already ringing from all of the complaints -- "I don't have time for that, that's obsessive compulsive, I have a life, I'm not a fitness model, it's too hard..."

My answer? Quit whining you wussy! All it really takes is one extra step. Yeah, it's soooo hard to pour your cereal into a measuring cup first before putting it into a bowl. It's backbreaking to scoop your rice out of the cooker with a measuring cup instead of a serving spoon. It throws your whole day off schedule to pour salad dressing into a tablespoon measurer instead of directly onto the salad. Give me a break. For most foods, especially fats and starches, which are the most important to measure, it takes an extra 10 seconds to get an exact measurement, instead of just winging it.

What's the real reason why most of us fight the idea of measuring our food? Well, some of us are just plain lazy as shit. But for most of us I think it really boils down to the fact that we just don't want to know the truth. And the truth is most of us eat 3-5 times the normal serving sizes of food.

We don't want to measure our foods because we know it forces us to exercise good portion control. It forces us to eat sensibly, instead of catering to our bad habit of overeating everything. We don't want to feel deprived of eating to our heart's (and belly's) content, so we sweep the

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whole idea of portion control under the rug and look for other areas to blame for our ever-expanding waistlines.

There are enough diet and fitness gurus out there that will promise you that you don't have to exercise good portion control. They blame certain foods (carbs, fats, meat, salt, gluten, etc.) as the cause of all your problems. Cut those out, and you can eat as much as you want of everything else. Sorry, it doesn't work that way. They're telling you what you want to hear, not what you need to hear.

The bottom line is that even if you make the right food choices, you still have to stay within your calorie and macronutrient totals to get results. Even too much "good" food can be stored as body fat. You have to get out of the bad habit of just mindlessly eating whatever is put in front of you, and start being an active participant in your weight loss program.

Here are some experiments to show you the value of measuring your food. I want you to measure out $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of cold cereal or cooked rice, the typical serving size for these foods, and put it into a bowl. What do you see? It's not a lot of food is it -- pretty shocking huh? Much different than what the average person eats with these foods -- fill the bowl to the brim, eat, refill, eat again.

Now take out your favorite salad dressing and measure out 2 tablespoons. It's just a drizzle isn't it? Much different than the typical salad drenched with so much dressing that there is a soupy mess by the time you get to the end. You can see that with almost all foods, there is a big discrepancy between the normal serving size that is posted on the label, and what we actually eat. Again, most people who don't measure their food eat 3-5 times the normal serving sizes.

I just laugh at fitness folks who proclaim that you don't need to count calories or macronutrients to get results. Really? Those are generally the ones who are either blessed with great genetics (and could do whatever they want and would still be in shape) or are not in as good as shape as you might think. Trust me, there are plenty of fitness experts, dieticians, and PhD types who hide behind headshots and credentials for a reason. Perhaps that's why there are so many diet plans out there that don't work.

I'm not interested in theory or opinion. I'm interested in real world results. And if you look at the diet plans of the fittest people in the world -- fitness athletes and models -- you'll see that they all measure their food. Four ounces of this, 1 cup of that, 2 tbsp of this, 1 piece of that, etc., etc., and these are for the "healthy/good" foods. If you are serious about dropping body fat, you should follow their example.

Hopefully I've convinced you to take that extra step of measuring food; it's the only way you'll truly know if you're eating the 30g of carbohydrate your supposed to be eating per meal, or 90-120g. If so, here are some random thoughts about how to implement this process:

- Buy a couple of sets of measuring cups (1/4 cup to 1 cup) and teaspoon/tablespoon measurers.
- Use measuring cups as serving spoons instead of traditional utensils.

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- There is no need to weigh your meats, poultry, and fish on a scale. Simply buy these foods one pound (16oz) at a time and cut them up according to your dietary needs. If you are supposed to be eating 3oz servings cut into 5 pieces, 4oz servings = 4 pieces, 5oz servings = 3 pieces, 8oz servings = 2 pieces. It doesn't have to be exact; we just want the right range. See I'm not so bad! Food scales are a pain in the ass.
- Pour oils, dressings, and condiments into teaspoon or tablespoon measurers before cooking or topping food.
- No need to measure non-starchy vegetables (broccoli, lettuce, spinach, onions, etc.) UNLESS they are cooked in butter or oil. Plain vegetables are pretty much free foods that can be eaten in unlimited amounts.
- Buy smaller bowls and plates so you can't over serve (i.e., a small bowl that only fits one cup of food). This makes you feel like you are eating larger portions and not depriving yourself. It also gives you the opportunity to "clean your plate", which is an American habit. Smaller serving dishes are common in many cultures like the Japanese, or Spanish tapas. They key -- don't go back for seconds!
- When you don't have access to measuring cups and spoons, like eating out at a friend's or at a restaurant, you'll have to eyeball portion sizes. Four to six ounces of meat, poultry, or fish is about the size of the palm of your hand or a deck of cards. One cup of starch is about the size of a closed fist. Two tablespoons of dressing is about 2 spoonfuls, or about ½ of most of the cups they use for the "dressing on the side".
- Most restaurants serve at least 2 times the normal serving sizes of foods, many 3-5 times. When you eat at restaurants a good idea is to eat half the meal and save the other half for leftovers, or give it to a homeless person. They could probably use the calories more than you.