

You Are What You Eat On: Downsize Your Plate, Downsize Your Weight

March is National Nutrition Month.[®] Celebrate healthier consumption this month by focusing on how you're eating.

A young man recently bought an older house and was surprised when his plates didn't fit on the kitchen shelves. He discovered that cabinets were smaller in yesterday's houses, because the dishes were smaller.

- Today's dinner plates can be as large as 15 inches, compared with 9-inch plates that used to be the norm when granny served her pot roast dinners.
- And the square plates that are popular today are bigger than the same size round plate: a 10-inch square has 21 square inches more space than a 10-inch round.

Does a bigger plate or serving really mean you're going to eat more? Numerous studies say yes. Among the findings:

- A group of nutrition science professors and graduate students who were given larger bowls and scoops served themselves about 53% more ice cream than those given smaller bowls and scoops.
- Moviegoers in suburban Chicago who were given free large tubs of popcorn ate 51% more than people given medium-size tubs, even though they had just eaten lunch, and the popcorn was stale.

If your everyday dinnerware is on the large side, try using salad plates for most meals, certainly use the smaller plates for the kids in the house. Or, follow the lead of the expensive restaurants. Place the food in the middle of the plate, leaving significant "white space" all around.

Adopt "the plate method" of food portions.

Whatever size plate you are using, go back to your early math lessons on fractions to guide your meal decisions. Here are the recommended proportions for optimum healthy eating:

- Half the plate (or half the food on your plate) = non-starchy vegetables. (Some sources include fruit; others suggest a single fruit serving as a side dish.)
- One quarter of your plate = low-glycemic starches (whole grains, non-white choices in rice, pasta, breads), fruit, or dairy products.
- About one quarter or a little less = lean protein, including meats, seafood, or poultry.
- The remaining 5% or less = healthy fats, such as olive oil, avocados, nuts and seeds.

Sources: American Dietetic Association; www.familyeducation.com; *Journal of the American Dietetic Association (Portion Size Me: Downsizing Our Consumption Norms)*; www.mass.gov/nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/eatright/distortion.htm; Realage.com

Change Your Ways And Change Your Waist

A few small changes in eating behaviors can really add up in the effort to slim down.

1. Slow down and enjoy the meal.

When you gobble down your food, you'll probably eat more and end up feeling it later.

2. Leave it on your plate.

Many of us have been trained to "clean our plates," but leaving even a few bites will help you focus more on internal signals of satisfaction and less on eating food because it's there.

3. Don't eat from the container or package.

It's easy to keep eating until the food is gone. Measure a single serving into a small bowl.

4. Choose the right glass.

Select a slender glass for all beverages except water. We tend to fill short, wide glasses with more liquid, and drink more.

5. Drink Mostly Water.

Beverages add calories, too. When you can, replace soft drinks, juice drinks, energy drinks, specialty coffees and alcoholic drinks with water.

