

Healthy Eating

Simple Steps to Eat Smaller Portions

By Kari Bachman

I remember eating out at a restaurant once with my family where everybody got a plate of food big enough to feed four people. Not even my father, famous for his bottomless stomach, could finish his pasta. When we were done, we almost staggered out of the restaurant nearly sick from eating so much.

In most concession stands, stores and restaurants, portions have greatly increased in size. The large popcorn at the movies is now so big it's hard to carry to our seats. Compared to a muffin of today, one from the 1970's looks mouse-sized. It's the same with frozen and fast foods.

When portions are large we eat faster. Instead of savoring a small piece of chocolate as the Europeans do, we devour gigantic bars. We no longer focus on quality, but on quantity.

Studies show that when we serve ourselves more food, we tend to eat more without realizing it. We lose the ability to feel hunger and to know when we have eaten enough.

To start eating smaller portions, try these tips:

At home...

- Create a calm environment when eating to encourage everyone to eat more slowly.
- Use smaller plates. Try serving dinner on salad plates, or buy inexpensive small plates at a flea market.
- Let family members serve their own food in moderate amounts. If they're still hungry afterwards, they can eat a bit more.

When going out to eat...

- Choose restaurants that serve reasonably sized portions of quality foods. Buying a lot of mediocre food is a waste of money.
- Ask to have half your meal packed in a to-go bag before it's served to reduce temptation to eat everything in one sitting.
- Share a main dish and a salad with a dinner companion, rather than eating them all yourself.

Let's rid ourselves of the notion that "more is better" and remember that food nourishes both our bodies and our minds.

Kari Bachman is a nutrition program coordinator with New Mexico State University's Cooperative Extension Service. She can be reached at (505) 646-2009, or by e-mail at kbachman@nmsu.edu.