What's the difference between a portion and a serving?

A "portion" is how much food you choose to eat, whether in a restaurant, from a package, or in your own kitchen. A "serving" is a standard amount set by the U.S. Government, or sometimes by others for recipes, cookbooks, or diet plans. There are two commonly used standards for serving sizes:

**MyPyramid Plan** can help you make healthier food choices from every food group and find your balance between food and physical activity. MyPyramid replaces the Food Guide Pyramid. Available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) at [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)

**The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Nutrition Facts Label** is printed on most packaged foods. It tells you how many calories and how much fat, carbohydrate, sodium, and other nutrients are in one serving of the food. The serving size is based on the amount of food people say they usually eat in one sitting. This size is often different than the serving sizes in the Food Guide Pyramid.

How do I know how big my portions are?

*For foods that don't have a Nutrition Facts label, such as ground beef, use a kitchen scale to measure the food in ounces (according to the Food Guide Pyramid, one serving of meat, chicken, turkey, or fish is 2 to 3 ounces).*

The portion size that you are used to eating may be equal to two or three standard servings. Take a look at this Nutrition Facts label for cookies. The serving size is two cookies, but if you eat four cookies, you are eating two servings—and double the calories, fat, and other nutrients in a standard serving.
To see how many servings a package contains, check the "servings per container" listed on the Nutrition Facts label. You may be surprised to find that small containers often have more than one serving inside.

Learning to recognize standard serving sizes can help you judge how much you are eating. When cooking for yourself, use measuring cups and spoons to measure your usual food portions and compare them to standard serving sizes from Nutrition Facts labels for a week or so. Put the measured food on a plate before you start eating. This will help you see what one standard serving of a food looks like compared to how much you normally eat.

Another way to keep track of your portions is to use a food diary. Writing down when, what, how much, where, and why you eat can help you be aware of the amount of food you are eating and the times you tend to eat too much. The chart below shows what 1 day of a person's food diary might look like.

After reading the food diary, you can see that this person chose sensible portion sizes for breakfast and lunch-she ate to satisfy her hunger. She had a large chocolate bar in the afternoon for emotional reasons-boredom, not in response to hunger. If you tend to eat when you are not hungry, try doing something else, like taking a break to walk around the block or call a friend, instead of eating.

By 8 p.m., this person was very hungry and ate large portions of higher-fat, higher-calorie foods. If she had made an early evening snack of fruit or pretzels, she might have been less hungry at 8 p.m. and eaten less. She also may have eaten more than she needed because she was at a social event, and was not paying attention to how much she was eating. Through your diary, you can become aware of the times and reasons you eat too much, and try to make different choices in the future.

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