



When our grandmothers served morning tea, it was likely to consist of water based instant coffee and a small biscuit or two. These days, we meet girlfriends for coffee and are presented with a smorgasboard of muffins, giant cookies and countless milk-based coffee choices. Its little wonder the prevalence of obesity in Australia has doubled in the past 20 years. "People's ideas of portion size are so different to what is recommended in Australia," says dietician Melanie McGrice (nutritionplus.com.au). "A lot of people don't need to change what they're eating, it's just about getting the quantities right."

BANG FOR OUR BUCK?

It's hardly surprising that our understanding of how much we should be eating has become foggy in the past couple of decades. Packaged foods and restaurant and café meals are bigger than they've ever been before, feeding our notion that more on the plate represents value for money. "It doesn't cost restaurants very much to increase the portion size, but it does cost them a lot to use more expensive ingredients," McGrice explains. "It's also happening in supermarkets, with deals like 'Buy one get one free' or '10 per cent extra

for the same price'. It can seem like good judgement at the time, but in the end, it's more likely to add kilojoules to our diet and fat to our hips."

The lack of industry guidelines around what constitutes an appropriate portion of packaged food also sets us up for confusion. It's common for the nutritional panel of a 375 millilitre can of soft drink and a 600 millilitre bottle to claim they are both one serving. "The manufacturers determine how many servings they say are in a package – often there will be something like 2.7 serves per package, but it might not even be a food that can be divided into 2.7," says dietician Amanda Clark, author of *Portion Perfection – A Visual Weight Control Plan* (greatideas.net.au, \$34.95). "The food manufacturers usually calculate that in a very strategic way."

MEALTIME MATHS

The good news is, calculating the right portion sizes to help you lose or maintain weight is actually very simple – you just need to know what your plates should look like so you can apply the knowledge to home cooking or when you're eating out.

For starters, it's worth having a basic knowledge of kilojoules. As a guide for weight loss, aim to have a 1250 kilojoule breakfast, a 1450 kilojoule lunch and dinner and three 400 kilojoule snacks. If you want to maintain your weight, then you can increase your breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks by 400 kilojoules each. "I teach people to know what constitutes 400 kilojoules, because then you can look at a plate and count up the kilojoules," Clark explains. "For example, 400 kilojoules is approximately what's in a slice of bread, a piece of fruit, a fun-size chocolate bar, a mini muffin or 100 grams of yoghurt. Non-starchy

vegetables have very few kilojoules, so you can usually eat as much as you like."

In order to keep your breakfast cereal in check, Clark recommends reading the nutritional panel to work out what constitutes a 600 kilojoule serve, then adding milk. "For muesli, you can usually have about half a cup plus milk, but for flaky cereals, it's probably more likely a cup of cereal plus milk," she explains. "Or you might have two small slices of toast with a slice of cheese and tomato."

As a general rule, divide your lunch and dinner plates into one half and two quarters. "You want your plate to have half vegetables or salad, a quarter protein and a quarter carbs," Clark explains. The protein quota consists of lean meat, fish, dairy, legumes or eggs. "You should limit your meat to pieces that are roughly the size and width of your palm," McGrice points out. Your carb component comes from things like pasta, rice, bread or fruit. "You'd generally be looking for about three-quarters of a cup of pasta or rice if you're wanting to lose weight, or one cup if you want to maintain," Clark says. "Potato, pumpkin, peas and corn are all starchy vegetables so they make up the carbohydrate quarter of your meal. Leafy and bright coloured vegetables should fill up the other half of the plate."

PLAN AHEAD

One of the best ways to ensure you don't accidentally blow out your portions is to eat regular meals and snacks. "If you're famished before a meal, you're more likely to eat bigger portions mindlessly," McGrice says. Eating meals and snacks at the same time each day helps your body program the hunger hormone ghrelin. "Research shows that if you eat at the same time every day, ghrelin develops a

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routine and will start to be produced at the same time," McGrice explains. "It's like your body's appetite clock and it will tell you when it's time to have something to eat and give you a better idea of how much you need. When people eat small, regular meals throughout the day, they are less likely to become overly hungry and overeat."

Planning your week's meals and snacks before you do your grocery shopping is another great strategy for ensuring you fill up the vegetable quota of your lunch and dinner plates. "You want at least five cups of raw vegetables or two-and-a-half cups of cooked vegetables every day," McGrice points out.

Once you develop good portion habits, it becomes second nature. "When you've trained your body to eat the correct portion sizes on a regular basis, overeating tends to make you feel really uncomfortable," McGrice says. "And if you do have a special dinner on the cards, compensate for potentially larger portions by doing some exercise before you go."

RESTAURANT RULES

Most restaurants, pubs and cafés serve dishes well above the 1450 kilojoule recommended portion size, so Clark suggests generally eating half. "The average café meal is more like 2500 to 3000 kilojoules, so often just eating half of what's on your plate pretty much gets you there," she explains. A good way to do that is to serve up your portion onto a separate plate. "If I get a big bowl of pasta, I will serve some of it up on a bread and butter plate, then push the rest away and fill up on a side salad," McGrice says.

THE CHANGING FACE OF PORTIONS

Portions have seriously blown out in the past 20 years, leading to mass confusion about what constitutes an appropriate-sized snack or meal. If in doubt, opt for what your grandmother would have eaten.

1990S PORTIONS	PORTIONS TODAY
20g Kit Kat (420 kilojoules)	78g Kit Kat Chunky King Size (1700 kilojoules)
200ml take-away coffee in polystyrene cup with water and a dash of full-cream milk and sugar (355 kilojoules)	250ml take-away milk-based coffee (440 kilojoules) 470ml large coffee (2000 kilojoules)
30g packet of chips (630 kilojoules)	100g packet of chips (2090 kilojoules)
Small choc-chip cookie (210 kilojoules)	Café-style jumbo choc-chip cookie (2090 kilojoules)
390ml bottle soft drink (670 kilojoules)	600ml bottle soft drink (1025 kilojoules)

*Source: *Portion Perfection – A Visual Weight Control Plan* (greatideas.net.au, \$34.95)

Perfect PORTIONS

Super-sized servings are having a major impact on our waistlines. How do you measure the perfect sized portions to keep you in shape?

WORDS KIMBERLY GILLANT