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NJSACOP Installs 98th President Chief Raymond J. Hayducka



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Control Your Portions!

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Not too long ago, a pretty clever study was conducted on one of the most famous meals of all time. The researchers examined 52 paintings of the so-called “Last Supper” to see how the size of food and plates has been portrayed over the last millennium. They estimated that over the course of 1,000 years, the size of the plate depicted in the artwork has increased by 66%. In addition, the size of the main course entrée has increased by 69%.

Although the results of the study are based entirely on estimates—the researchers used the head sizes of the apostles as reference points—the fact is that if you compare foods and beverages that are sold today with those that were sold in the past, it’s readily apparent that the size of portions has increased substantially. If you don’t believe that, just walk into any quick-service (aka fast-food) restaurant or convenience store and try to order a small size of anything. Truly, medium is the new small.

According to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, over a 20-year period, a plain bagel has gone from 140 calories to 350 calories; a cheeseburger from 333 calories to 590 calories; a soda from 85 calories to 250 calories; and popcorn from 270 calories to 630 calories.

So what’s wrong with bigger portions? After all, isn’t it more economical to “supersize” a meal when asked (or to “upgrade” a meal to the next size as I was recently asked)? Well, the problem is that most people tend to eat what they’re served. And that means more calories.

In a classic study that was conducted at Penn State, 75 subjects were given a deli-style sandwich for lunch once per week for four weeks. Each time they had lunch, the sandwich was a different size. The subjects could eat as much or as little as desired. The researchers found that as the size of the sandwich portion increased, so did the number of calories that were consumed.

In another study that was also conducted at Penn State, 51 subjects were given macaroni and cheese for lunch once per week for four weeks. Each time they had lunch, the meal was a different size. The subjects were divided into two groups: One group received the food on a plate and another group received the food in a large serving dish and then self-served the food onto their plates. When given the largest portion of food, the subjects consumed nearly 30% more calories compared to when given the smallest portion of food. And get this, 55% of the subjects didn’t notice any difference in the portions that they were served.

Here’s a really interesting study: 85 faculty, graduate students and staff members at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign were invited to attend an ice cream social to celebrate the success of a colleague. The subjects randomly received either a small or large bowl along with a small or large spoon. The remarkable thing about this particular study is that the subjects were members of a nutrition and food science department, many of whom were “internationally renowned.” Despite being highly educated in nutrition, their food intake was still influenced by the size of their bowls and spoons.

On a related note, many people eat until their plates are “clean” or bowls are empty. Researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign randomly assigned 54 subjects to eat tomato soup from either a normal bowl or a bowl that was rigged to refill itself “slowly and almost imperceptibly” as its contents were consumed. Both bowls held 18 ounces and looked identical. The subjects were told to “enjoy as much soup as they wanted” and did so for 20 minutes. Those who unknowingly ate from the self-refilling bowls consumed 73% more soup and calories than those who ate from the normal bowls. On average, those who ate from the normal bowls had nine ounces of soup; some in the latter group slurped down more than a quart (32 ounces) of soup! Remember, the bowls held 18 ounces. And although the subjects consumed 73% more soup, they didn’t think that they had consumed more. In fact, they underestimated their intake by an astonishing 104.5 calories.

So how can you decrease the size of your portions so as not to increase the size of your waist? It’s actually fairly easy to do. Simply use smaller plates and bowls. Essentially, doing this helps limit the size of your portions and, as a result, lower the number of calories that you consume. And it certainly makes sense that if you decide to eat an entire bowl of potato chips, for example, a smaller bowl would yield fewer calories than a larger bowl.

But don’t dispose of your larger plates and bowls; you can use these items to give yourself bigger servings of healthier foods such as fruits and vegetables.

Bottom Line: Control your portion sizes by using smaller plates and bowls and don’t feel the need to eat what you’re served.