

When Size Matters

We live in the land of gigantic [food portions](#). From the enormous bowls of pasta and the big slabs of beef served in restaurants to plate-sized [pizza](#) slices and jumbo bags of chips, it's very common to consume three or four or even five "servings" at a time. Think not? Consider these commonly accepted serving sizes* and what they look like.



1 Pasta Serving = 1/3 to 1/2 cup

According to the USDA Dietary Guidelines (and their famous Food Guide Pyramid), a serving of [pasta](#) is one-half of a cup. The American Diabetes Association says a serving is one-third of a cup. **The visual: A tennis ball sliced in half.**

1 Meat, Poultry, or Fish Serving = 2 to 3 ounces

The accepted serving size for this category of food is, generally, three ounces. (The USDA says two to three ounces.) **The visual: A deck of cards, or a checkbook.**

1 Milk or Yogurt Serving

One cup is the serving size almost always used for all types of milk and [yogurt](#). **The visual: A yogurt container, or the size of your fist.**

1 Natural Cheese Serving

Natural cheeses are cheddar, provolone, Muenster, Swiss, etc. One serving is equal to 1 1/2 ounces, which might be easier to think of as 3 tablespoons. Processed cheese (cheese food, such as American), for some reason, gets a serving size of two ounces. **The visual: 4 dice stacked on top of each other, or the average thumb.**

1 Serving of Fruit

With whole fruit, a serving is a medium-sized apple, banana, orange, or pear — keep in mind most of what we see in [grocery stores](#) are large to extra-large varieties. If it's chopped, cooked, or canned, the serving size is one-half cup. **The visual: A tennis ball sliced in half.**

1 Serving of Grains

If the [grains](#) are cooked, like oatmeal, serving size is one-half cup. If it's cold cereal, a serving is three-fourths to one cup. **The visual: For oatmeal, an ice cream scoop; for cold cereal, a teacup to a fist.**

*Serving sizes are created for the purpose of giving people healthy and appropriate nutrition information and guidelines. Serving sizes are established so that what you see on the Nutrition Facts [labels](#) on food products is somewhat standardized. Also, it's a way for government agencies, like the USDA, to recommend amounts of different types of foods for optimal health and [weight control](#).

Five Tips to Help You Avoid Portion Distortion

1. When looking at the Nutrition Facts label on a product, get in the habit of glancing at the serving size (this may be futile; sometimes it's in grams or another unit that's not user-friendly) and automatically doubling or tripling the calories, [carbs](#), and other nutrients you check.
2. At [restaurants](#), send half your plate back to the kitchen to be wrapped up as soon as you can without being rude.
3. Take out your measuring cups and [train yourself](#) — using water, dry rice or beans, and some play-dough — to know what a half-cup and a cup look like in your everyday bowls.
4. Train yourself to only order small or kid's size when ordering anything at a restaurant, snack bar, etc.
5. Use a smaller [plate](#) when eating at home, and away from home, always leave some food on your plate (cancel your membership to the "clean plate club").