

Portion Control Fact Sheet

It's important to pay attention to the portions of food you eat because of the effect on your weight. There are a variety of ways to keep track of portions. The Hand Method is often used by dietitians to help people think about portions. Another method is to "eyeball" the food on a plate and compare it to another visual reference, like a deck of cards. When preparing food at home, you can use measuring tools. Each method is described below followed by a list of portion sizes of some common foods. It may be hard at first to pay attention to portion size, but with time and practice, it will get easier!

Hand Method

A thumb is about the size of 1 ounce of food. Your palm is about the size of 3 ounces of food or one serving of meat. Your fist is equivalent to 1 cup or 8 ounces. For example, a portion of rice as large as your fist is equal to about three servings of rice. The tip of your thumb is the same size as a teaspoon. Using the thumb tip is a good way to keep track of fat portions, such as the amount of margarine that counts as one serving.

Visual References

Here are some common items to use as visual references for portions. A deck of cards is the same size as a 3-ounce serving of meat, the recommended amount for a meal. A golf ball is the size of a single ounce of meat. A tennis ball is about the size of a healthy serving of fruit. Four dice equals 1 ounce of cheese. Invent your own visual references for your favorite foods to help with portion control.

Measuring Tools

Measure solid foods such as rice, pasta, or vegetables in a dry measuring cup, which is different from a liquid measuring cup. Measure cooked foods after cooking. Use measuring spoons for fats such as oil, margarine, and salad dressings. Do not use tableware to measure because it may be inaccurate. Use measuring tools to find out how much the cup, glass, and other pieces of dishware you use actually hold. Notice how a serving of food, such as 3 ounces of meat or 1/3 cup of cooked pasta, looks on the plate or bowl you typically use.

Hand

1 baked potato = fist
1 ounce of chips or pretzels = 2 handfuls
1 ounce of nuts = thumb
1 serving of fat (margarine) = thumb
3 ounces of meat (one serving) = palm
1 serving of vegetable = 1 handful

Visual

2 Tbsp peanut butter = ping pong ball
3 ounces of cooked meat = deck of cards
1 piece of cornbread = bar of soap
1 serving of bread = one slice
½ cup cooked broccoli = scoop of ice cream
1½ ounces of cheese = 3 dominoes
Medium piece of fruit = baseball
1 ounce of cheese = 4 dice
½ bagel = hockey puck

Measuring Tools

Liquids
1 cup = 8 ounces fat-free or 1% milk
½ cup of canned fruit (no sugar added)
½ cup juice
Solids
¼ cup of dried fruit
¾ cup dry unsweetened cereal
½ cup yams or peas
1/3 cup cooked pasta or rice

