

FitFUTURE

Strategies for
Better Living.

Understanding MyPlate and Portion Sizes



by Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD, CDN

When families follow the MyPlate recommendations for daily servings, they are on their way to healthy balanced nutrition. As important as good food choices are, portion size is also an important consideration. A few things to distinguish are:

- **Serving Size**

A serving is a specific amount of food or drink that is defined by common measurements, such as cups, ounces, or tablespoons. Examples include recommended servings from MyPlate and the serving size on a Nutrition Facts label. In many cases, the serving size listed on the Nutrition Facts label is different from the MyPlate recommended serving size.

- **Portion Size**

A portion is basically the amount of food that happens to end up on the plate. Portions can be bigger or smaller than the recommended serving size.

Visualizing Portion Sizes

You may not recognize what a reasonable portion looks like. What does one-half cup of pasta look like?

What about three ounces of chicken or two tablespoons of peanut butter?

The good news is that you don't need a measuring cup or scale to measure the portions you and your children should eat. Instead, you can visualize them by using familiar objects including:

- **Woman's fist or baseball** - a serving of vegetables or fruit is about the size of your fist
- **A rounded handful** - about one half cup cooked or raw veggies or cut fruit, a piece of fruit, or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cooked rice or pasta – this is a good measure for a snack serving, such as chips or pretzels
- **Deck of cards** - a serving of meat, fish or poultry or the palm of your hand – for example, one chicken breast, $\frac{1}{4}$ pound hamburger patty or a medium pork chop
- **Golf ball or large egg** - one quarter cup of dried fruit or nuts
- **Tennis ball** - about one half cup of ice cream
- **Computer mouse** - about the size of a small baked potato

- **Compact disc** - about the size of one serving of pancake or a small waffle
- **Thumb tip** - about one teaspoon of peanut butter
- **Six dice** - a serving of cheese
- **Check book** - a serving of fish

Portion sizes for children

Children need calories to meet their needs for growth. On the other hand, portions that are too large could lead to overeating or seem overwhelming. Serving small portions to young children is often the best way for them to learn to eat only until satisfied. Start kids off with less and encourage them to ask for more if they're still hungry.

