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EAT MODERATELY: The first step to loose weight

The first step to loose weight and be healthy is to control your eating habits. Loosing weight starts with eating moderately.

eat moderately nutrition obesity frugality diet dieting

Did you know that your new automobile is likely to have a larger cup-holder than your older model? That restaurants use larger plates, bakers are selling larger muffins, pizzerias have larger pans, and fast food companies are using larger French fries and drink containers than 20 years ago? Did you know that identical recipes for cookies and desserts in the old editions of "Joy of Cooking" specify fewer servings?

It is evident to all of us that overweight and obesity have increased sharply in the USA in adults and children in the last few years. Since studies show that activity of people has not changed much in the last decades, the increase in body overweight must come from a change in the food intake. Considering that about half the people in the USA consume their meals outside the home, the portion sizes become an important factor in the increase of body overweight.

The American Journal of Public Health published a study about the current sizes of portions in restaurants, fast foods, and food manufacturers. The authors compared the data with the sizes of the past 30 years, and they came up with some amazing numbers. First they noted that all the portions offered in every category exceed by far the guidelines of the USDA and the FDA. Cookies are seven times bigger than recommended, cooked pasta five times larger, muffins three times larger, and so on.

Then they discovered that portion sizes began to grow in the 1970s and have continued to grow at the same rate as body overweight. Food and fast food companies today promote larger items and use larger sizes as selling points. Widespread price competition has induced manufacturers to introduce larger items as a means to expand market share, since they discovered that profit rises when the product size is increased. In the mid '70s Mc Donald offered only one size of French fries: that size today is called "small". The food industry invests billions in making their products more attractive, sexier, saltier, or sweeter and we are vulnerable to their promotions. This happens at a moment when we became more sedentary and kids spend longer hours in front of the TV or their computers.

Going to Europe or other countries we see some striking differences in the food habits. First of all there is not so much advertising about food. Most of the Italian TV ads are about basic ingredients such as olive oil, wine, and pasta, and not so much about prepackaged food or fast food chains. In addition the portion sizes are considerably smaller than in America. I recently had dinner in a steakhouse and the smallest portion available on the menu was a 10 oz filet mignon. That is about three times larger than the average size of a portion of meat in Italy.

I noticed myself many times that people moving to the USA from other countries would gain weight in few months. There is no doubt in my mind that the large amount of food we ingest today is one of the main causes for the general growth of overweight in America. This doesn't affect only people with a weight problem, but also those who are maybe only a few pounds over and struggle to control the size of their waistline. In an environment where lifestyle and advertising pushes to eat out more and in larger quantities it is imperative that we learn how to control ourselves.

One very good way to start I learned from a trainer at the gym, and I encourage everyone to try. It is very simple: On a notepad write down everyday for a week everything that you ingest. Take note of the quantities, not only for the main meals, but even the smallest things such as drinks, candies and snacks. Then with the help of a calorie chart add up the numbers. Many people say "I don't know how I gain weight. I don't eat very much? I bet they are ready for a big surprise. It is incredible how all those little things we munch during the day add up to a large number of calories.

After the shock, the realization will come that something needs to be done. First it is important to understand what a regular portion looks like. 3 oz meat: is approximately the size of a deck of cards or a bar of soap (when was the last time you saw a steak of that size?); 3 oz fish: the size of a checkbook; 1 oz cheese: the size of matchbox; one

medium potato: the size of a computer mouse; 1 cup pasta: the size of two eggs.

When eating out choose the small or medium sizes instead of the large ones. Ask for half of the meal to be packed to go. Share your portion with a friend. Don't eat the bread and butter before the meal. For your home don't buy a lot of food, but buy single serving packages. If you snack don't eat from the bag, but place a few chips or crackers on a dish. Cut in the amount of sauces, mayonnaise and cream cheese, and use low calories types. If you are a big eater fill yourself with a large quantity of vegetables and eventually fresh fruit.

In conclusion: Everyone that tries to keep weight under control knows how difficult it is. The first step is to be inventive in ways to reduce the sizes of the food portions.

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