

HEALTH

Larger Portion Sizes Contribute To U.S. Obesity Problem

NewsUSA

(NU) - Food portions in America's restaurants have doubled or tripled over the last 20 years, a key factor that is contributing to a potentially devastating increase in obesity among children and adults.

"We Can!" (Ways to Enhance Children's Activities and Nutrition), a new program from the National Institutes of Health, offers parents tips to help their families maintain a healthy weight.

"Super-sized portions at restaurants have distorted what Americans consider a normal portion size, and that affects how much we eat at home as well," said Dr. Elizabeth G. Nabel, director of NIH's National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. "One way to keep calories in check is to keep food portions no larger than the size of your fist."

Larger portions mean more calories, which can easily add up to extra weight. Consider, for example, if you had today's portions of the following meals:

- Breakfast: a bagel (6 inches in diameter) and a 16-ounce coffee with sugar and milk.
- Lunch: two pieces of pepperoni pizza and a 20-ounce soda.
- Dinner: a chicken Caesar salad and a 20-ounce soda.

In one day, you would consume 1,595 more calories than if

you had the same foods at typical portions served 20 years ago. Over the course of one year, if consumed daily, the larger portions could amount to more than 500,000 extra calories.

Controlling portion sizes and eating smarter can help you and your family avoid extra calories. Here are some tips from the NIH:

- Bring a healthy, low-calorie lunch to work and pack a healthy "brown bag" for your children.

- When eating out, order an appetizer instead of an entrée, share an entrée or eat half of a meal and bring the rest home.

- Cut high-calorie foods like cheese and chocolate into small pieces and eat fewer pieces.

- Substitute a salad for french fries.

- For snacks, serve fruits and vegetables instead of sweets.

"We Can!" is designed to assist parents in helping children between the ages of 8 and 13 maintain a healthy weight through improving food choices, increasing physical activity and reducing television and recreational computer time. For a free parents' handbook and other resources, visit <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> or call 866-35-WECAN.

Portion Distortion	
20 Years Ago	Today
Bagel	
 3 inches (diameter)	 6 inches (diameter)
Cheeseburger	
 4.5 ounces	 8 ounces
Popcorn (medium bag)	
 5 cups	 11 cups
Soda	
 6.5 ounces	 20 ounces
<small>Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute</small>	