

SERVING UP HEALTHY PORTIONS

Introduction

This lesson gives an older adult audience the opportunity to critically reflect on how portion sizes have changed over time and to practice analyzing serving sizes and planning healthy portions. This lesson could be modified to include information about portion sizes for particular food groups, or an increased focus on label reading if the “Read the Label” lesson is not being taught separately.

Preparation

1. Review the topic.

- Start with the key concepts and discussion guide. The discussion guide provides suggested questions to draw out participants’ existing knowledge as well as information you can offer in response to each question.
- Consider your participant demographics and potential interests, and conduct any additional research that may be necessary to prepare for specific questions or improve your own understanding of key concepts (see “Program Guide” for suggested resources).

2. Plan your lesson structure.

- Determine whether time and resources allow for a food-based activity or whether you will use an alternate activity. This lesson includes one alternate activity, and additional activity suggestions are available in the “Program Guide.”
- See “Exercise for Health” lesson for ways to incorporate physical activity into the lesson, and plan to ask participants to share their favorite ways to exercise.
- Prepare a rough timeline of your lesson and a plan to integrate discussion with the activity. Depending on available time and participant interests, you can integrate discussion topics into an activity or use discussion time to open or close the lesson.

3. Plan how to administer pre-test (as well as post-test if this is the final session). See “Program Guide” for details.

4. Prepare materials.

- Review the appropriate activity and prepare any necessary materials.
- Choose and print handouts, recipes and pre-tests.

Suggested Recipes

- Single-Serving Trail Mix
- Easy Quesadillas

Suggested Handouts

- “Planning Healthy Portions”
- “Healthy Eating Away from Home”
- “Estimating Portion Sizes”

Key Concepts

Portion control is an important aspect of healthy eating, and eating smaller portions is a key step in preventing many diet-related diseases. Restaurant portion sizes—and even the portions of foods like bagels and chicken breasts at the grocery store—have changed significantly in many older adults’ lifetime, but it can be hard to recognize these changes and make different choices. Both general tips for portion control and guidelines for estimating healthy portion sizes for various types of food can be useful.



Discussion Guide

Does anyone pay attention to portion sizes when they go out to eat? Have you noticed any changes over time?

- Typical portions of foods like muffins, bagels, pizza, chips, popcorn and even salads are much larger today than they were 20 years ago.

How do you decide how much to eat? Do you know how many calories you need?

- Our calorie needs change as we age, and continue to depend on our level of physical activity as well as gender.
- Older adult women could need anywhere from 1,600 to 2,200 calories a day, depending on how much physical activity they get, while older adult men could need between 2,000 and 2,800 calories. Talk to your doctor to find out how many calories you need for your current age and lifestyle, or create a profile on <https://www.supertracker.usda.gov/> to get a personalized daily calorie allowance.

How can you find out how many calories are in packaged foods?

- When reading labels, make sure to compare serving size vs. number of servings per package. Many packages that you might think are a single portion—like a bottle of juice or a bag of chips—may actually contain two or more servings.

What do you do to control portion sizes when eating out and at home?

- Counting calories can be helpful if you're trying to lose weight or are using a meal plan to manage or prevent disease.
- Many people may find it easier to make sure they are eating the right amount of food for their bodies by paying attention to their portions. The MyPlate method can be helpful for planning balanced meals: fill half your plate with vegetables and fruits, 1/4 with lean proteins, and 1/4 with grains (and try to make at least half of your grain foods whole grain).
- The “Estimating Portion Sizes” handout provides guides for estimating portion sizes using your hands or other objects.
- Eating every 4 to 5 hours can help you avoid overeating when you're hungry (and can be important for people with diabetes who need to keep their blood sugar levels even), but snacks should be planned and balanced.
- Plan snacks based on vegetables and fruit, like cut vegetables you can dip in hummus or fruit with peanut butter.
- When you feel like eating an unplanned snack, ask yourself if you're really hungry. If a healthy snack like fruit, whole grain crackers or yogurt doesn't appeal to you, then try drinking a glass of water and finding an activity you can focus on until your next meal.
- Measure out an appropriate portion of snack food into a bowl rather than eating out of the package.
- Use smaller dishes so that appropriately sized portions make your plate or bowl look full.
- Try drinking beverages from a tall, skinny glass to trick yourself into being satisfied with less. (If you're really thirsty, make sure to drink plenty of water! Drinking water can also help you feel more full.)
- Serve your food in the kitchen and put the leftovers away right away so you won't be tempted by seconds.
- Give your brain time to realize your stomach is full by eating slowly; conversation can help you take more time between bites, or try reading or listening to music or the radio to give yourself something to focus on while you eat.
- When eating in restaurants, ask the server to only give you half of the food and pack up half to take home before you start eating. Or, plan to split a main dish with a friend or just order an appetizer.



Suggested Activities

If you have access to basic ingredients and supplies, we recommend planning the lesson around a cooking demonstration or activity that will show participants concrete skills that apply the lesson concepts. If limited resources or time make a food-based activity impossible, use the alternate activity or any of the other suggested activities in the “Program Guide.”

A. Food-Based Activity: Chickpea Couscous Combo

A quick and easy salad with whole-wheat couscous, chickpeas and whatever vegetables are handy (canned, fresh or frozen) provides a basic formula for managing portions. Using raw leafy greens provides the opportunity for a discussion of vegetable portions for leafy greens vs. other vegetables. Extra handouts may be useful for demonstrating healthy portion sizes (see Program Guide for additional resources).

Discussion points to address while preparing food (see discussion guide as well):

- About how many servings of (grain/protein/vegetables) do you need every day?
- How many cups of (couscous/beans/raw greens/vegetables) counts as a serving of (grain/protein/vegetables)?
- If you need x servings of (food type) every day, how many would you have in one meal? How many cups would that be?
- In addition to this meal, how much more would you eat from each food group throughout the day?

(Use this table for guidelines on serving needs and sizes; actual amounts vary with age/gender/activity level)

Food Group	Daily Servings	Serving Size	Amount in recipe (one meal)
Grains	5-6	1/2 cup cooked pasta	1 cup (2 servings)
Protein	About 5	1/4 cup cooked beans	1/2 cup (2 servings)
Vegetables	2-3	2 cups raw leafy greens, 1 cup other vegetables	1 cup raw leafy greens (1/2 serving), 1/2 cup other vegetables (1/2 serving)

Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixing bowl(s): one for demo, or per group • Mixing spoon(s): one for demo, or per group • Forks to mix dressing and fluff couscous • Sample dishes and spoons for each participant
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start by deciding whether the activity will be a demonstration or will involve participation. If participants will be preparing food themselves, decide whether they will work alone or in groups. • Review Program Guide for tips on leading a cooking demo or guiding participants through a recipe. • Review ingredients and make substitutions as necessary. • Modify recipe as necessary, and print copies for participants to take home. • Drain and rinse beans and vegetables.
Ingredients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole-wheat couscous • Chickpeas or other beans • Canned, roasted or raw vegetables • Raw leafy greens • Water • Olive oil • Lemon juice or red wine vinegar • Salt and pepper, optional cumin
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover couscous with 1/4 cup boiling water per cup dry couscous, cover, and let sit for 5 minutes. • Whisk together olive oil and lemon juice or vinegar with salt, pepper and cumin. • Fluff couscous with fork and mix with chickpeas, vegetables, greens, and vinaigrette.

B. Alternate Activity: Portion Distortion

Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Portion Distortion” pages (see Appendix) , sticky notes (or paper and tape) to cover one side
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print “Portion Distortion” pages and cover right side calorie amount and tips separately
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask participants: have you noticed any changes in portion sizes over the years? • Go through “Portion Distortion” pages one at a time, asking participants to guess how many calories or what size each food was 20 years ago. • After revealing the correct answer, ask for ideas to deal with this “portion distortion.” Reveal tips as participants provide their own suggestions.

Chickpea Couscous Combo

A quick and easy salad with whole-wheat couscous, chickpeas and whatever vegetables are handy (canned, fresh or frozen) provides a basic formula for managing portions. Remember, two cups of raw leafy greens or one cup of cooked greens or other vegetables counts as one of your daily 2-3 servings. Half a cup of couscous counts as one of your daily 5-6 servings of grains, so you might choose to have two servings (or one whole cup) in one meal. Just 1/4 cup cooked beans (like chickpeas) counts as one of your five daily servings of protein foods, so try half a cup (or two servings) to make this a main meal.

INGREDIENTS

serves one (2 servings grains, 2 servings protein, 1 serving vegetables)

- 1/4 cup whole-wheat couscous (uncooked)
- 1/2 cup chickpeas (or other beans)
- 1 cup canned, cooked or raw vegetables (try tomatoes or carrots)
- 1 cup leafy greens like spinach or arugula, or substitute 1/2 cup other vegetables
- 1/4 teaspoon olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon lemon juice or red wine vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste, optional pinch of cumin

DIRECTIONS

1. Pour 1/4-1/2 cup boiling water over couscous and cover.
2. Drain and rinse beans and vegetables.
3. Use a fork to whisk together olive oil, lemon juice or vinegar, salt and pepper, and cumin (if using).
4. Combine beans, vegetables and greens a bowl.
5. After couscous has steamed for 5 minutes, fluff with a fork and mix with beans, vegetables and greens.
6. Add vinaigrette to bowl and stir to coat salad.