

Small Steps to Health and Wealth-Say “No” to Super-Sizing

The other day I was visiting with a friend at the end of a noon-hour meeting. As we were finishing up, my friend looked down at her mega-size soda pop container. She groaned, and said, “Oh, I’m so full. I wanted to get the smaller drink, but they talked me into the bigger one because it was more pop for less money.” She bought the large size drink because it was cheaper, but then ended up consuming much more of the beverage than she originally wanted. She had been duped by the “value marketing” technique.

Value marketing is a term to describe the trend toward large food portions. The cost of food is relatively low, so manufacturers can sell larger quantities for just cents more. They maintain and increase their profit margin because people think they are getting a great deal. Consumers think larger portions are a bargain. You may have left the restaurant thinking, “Wow, I got all that for just \$10.” You probably didn’t take time to consider that you just consumed three times the calories you needed, and that many of the calories were laden with fat, salt and sugar. I challenge you to start noticing when you are being served enough on your plate that it should realistically be three meals.

If you want a very interesting read on portion sizes and eating behavior, get the book “Mindless Eating,” by Dr. Brian Wansink. The book is also available as an audio download from MontanaLibrary2Go. Contact your local librarian if you need help accessing the audio book online. Dr. Wansink has researched a variety of serving containers and how atmosphere and container size affect food consumption.

I believe we are at a transition point with food portions and the American society. We are starting to realize that the over-consumption of food produces poor results. We are seeing more manufacturers marketing “single-serving” or 100 calorie products. Some fast food chains have even swung the pendulum the other direction from “super-sizing” to offering “mini-meals.” Those of us who are old enough can recall portion sizes from yesteryear and readjust our portion sizes to what they were 20 years ago. The younger generation is going to have the most difficulty with the adjustment, because they have always lived with portion distortion.

According to the *National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute*, a cup of coffee 20 years ago was an 8 ounce cup with 45 calories. Today, a cup of coffee is generally a 16 ounce flavored coffee with 350 calories, for a difference of 305 calories. Consume that daily and it will add up. Taking in just 100 extra calories per day will result in a weight gain of 10 pounds per year. Coffee is not the only place that those portions and calories have changed in 20 years. A muffin today is 310 calories more than a muffin 20 years ago, a typical portion of spaghetti has 525 more calories than 20 years ago, and even Caesar salad has 400 more calories per serving than 20 years ago. Excess calories and weight can add up quickly.

The good news is that small steps in the right direction over time can add (or subtract) just as easily. This weekend I was reading a healthy adjustments cookbook. The nutritionist author

talked about simple recipe conversions, such as never sautéing in butter. Her rationale was that over the course of a lifetime, if you made that one change, you'd save 100 calories or so per recipe. It doesn't seem like much, one recipe at a time, but over the long-haul it can mean big changes. Most recipes can also withstand a 25% reduction in sugar without poor results. If you start combining adjustments in food preparation, the results can be huge over a lifetime.

As a behavior-change strategy, you may want to choose ways that you can say no to super-sizing and over-consuming. Perhaps that is by changing from flavored coffee back to straight black coffee. Maybe it is by eliminating a daily soda drinking habit. It may be as easy as asking for a travel container at the beginning of every restaurant meal and taking half home for the next day. Analyze your daily portions, see if you need to cut back and then look for a way to make changes. The changes may not have to be extreme. After all, it took 20 years before we noticed anything very dramatic about how our portion sizes had changed. Next time someone tries to persuade you into the "bigger is better" line of thinking, such as super-sizing your soda pop, consider whether you want to apply that same line of thinking when you step on the scale.