

# How much are you eating?



*"Make that mega-sized."*



*"I'll have the gigantic-gulp!"*



*"I don't believe I ate the whole thing!"*

Many people feel that the bigger the portion, the better. But is that so? Not if you're trying to manage your weight. One key to getting or keeping your weight in a healthy range is to eat sensible portions. That's easy to say—but not always so easy to do! This brochure gives tips to help you decide what sensible portions are for you, and to help you stick to those reasonable portion sizes.

## How much do you eat?

Suppose you had dinner at an Italian restaurant last night. You ordered spaghetti with meatballs. While you were waiting for your order, you ate 2 slices of garlic bread. How can you tell if this dinner is too much food for you? You need to estimate how much you ate, and then compare that to Food Guide Pyramid recommendations.

Think about your plateful of spaghetti and meatballs. Estimate the amounts of spaghetti, sauce, and meat. You may decide, for example, that the spaghetti portion was about 2 cups, the tomato sauce looked like about 1 cup, and the meatballs were about 6 ounces. With the 2 slices of garlic bread, you now have an idea about how much you ate for dinner. But how do your portions translate into standard servings? Chart 1 [page 3] lists the serving sizes for each Food Guide

Pyramid food group. According to the Pyramid, your portions equal the following number of servings:

### Spaghetti Dinner:

Food	Your portion	One Pyramid serving	Pyramid food group	Number of Pyramid servings you ate
Spaghetti	2 cups	½ cup	Grains	4
Garlic bread	2 slices	1 slice	Grains	2
Tomato sauce	1 cup	½ cup	Vegetables	2
Meatballs	6 oz.	2-3 oz.	Meat and beans	2-3

## Putting the Guidelines into Practice

March 2002

Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion  
United States Department of Agriculture

Home and Garden Bulletin No. 267-1



### Pyramid recommendations

To figure out if your spaghetti dinner was the right amount of food for you, use the Pyramid. Chart 1 also lists the number of servings recommended for each Pyramid food group, based on your calorie needs. Over a day, you should plan on eating the number of servings recommended from each group.

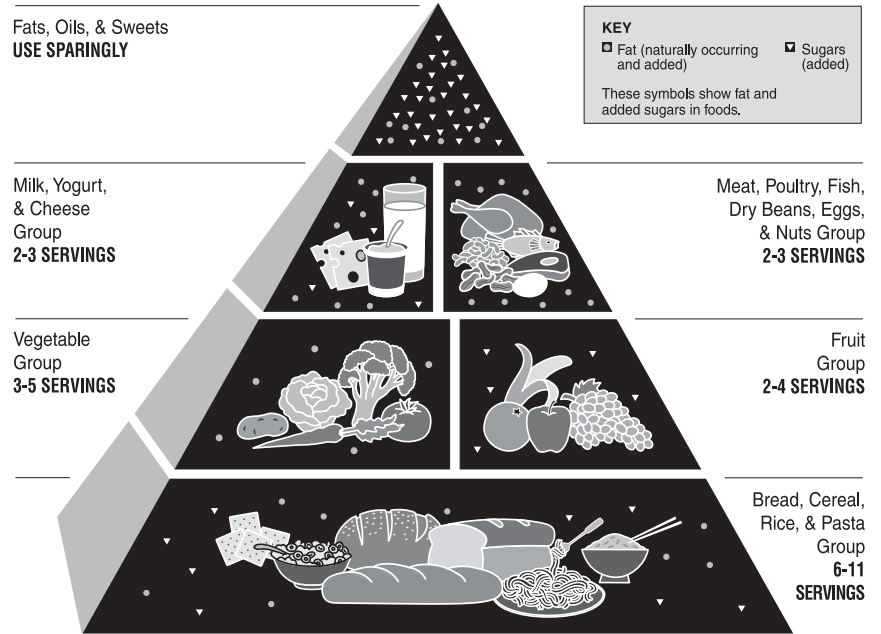
The number of servings from each food group recommended by the Pyramid depends on your calorie needs.

- Children ages 2 to 6 years, many inactive women, and some older adults may need about 1,600 calories per day.
- Most children over 6, teen girls, active women, and many inactive men may need about 2,200 calories per day.
- Teen boys and active men may need about 2,800 calories per day.

For example, if you need about 1,600 calories a day, the Pyramid recommends 6 daily servings from the Grains (Bread, Cereal, Rice & Pasta) group. How does this compare to your spaghetti dinner? Your dinner had 6 servings—the total daily recommendation for someone with your calorie needs. If you had counted your portions of spaghetti and bread as only 1 serving each, you might think you had only eaten 2 servings from the Grains group. But, you actually ate 6! By comparing the portion you ate with a standard Pyramid serving, you can judge whether your daily intake is right for you.

Pyramid serving sizes and the recommended number of servings from each group are *guides* to help determine your daily intake. Your portions do not have to match the standard serving size—they can be larger or smaller. But, the amount you eat over the day should match the total amount of a food that is recommended. *Often, the food portions of grains and meats that people choose are larger than the Pyramid serving size. Be especially careful when counting servings from these groups to figure out how many Pyramid servings are in your portions.*

## Food Guide Pyramid A Guide to Daily Food Choices



### Portions and servings— What's the difference?

A **portion** is the amount of food you choose to eat. There is no standard portion size and no single right or wrong portion size.

A **servings** is a standard amount used to help give advice about how much to eat, or to identify how many calories and nutrients are in a food.

#### For example:

You eat a sandwich with 2 slices of bread.

The Food Guide Pyramid **servings size** for bread is 1 slice.

Your **portion** is 2 slices, which equals 2 servings from the Pyramid Grains group.

Your 2 servings are one-third of the Pyramid recommendation of 6 servings for people needing 1,600 calories per day. (See Chart 1.)

## Chart 1. How to use the Food Guide Pyramid

### How many servings do you need each day?

What counts as a serving?	Children ages 2 to 6, women, some older adults (1,600 calories)	Older children, teen girls, active women, most men (2,200 calories)	Teen boys and active men (2,800 calories)
<b>Grains Group (Bread, Cereal, Rice, and Pasta)— especially whole grain</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 slice of bread</li> <li>• About 1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal</li> <li>• ½ cup of cooked cereal, rice, or pasta</li> </ul>	6	9	11
<b>Vegetable Group</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables</li> <li>• ½ cup of other vegetables—cooked or raw</li> <li>• ¾ cup of vegetable juice</li> </ul>	3	4	5
<b>Fruit Group</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 medium apple, banana, orange, pear</li> <li>• ½ cup of chopped, cooked, or canned fruit</li> <li>• ¾ cup of fruit juice</li> </ul>	2	3	4
<b>Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group— preferably fat free or low fat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 cup of milk** or yogurt</li> <li>• 1½ ounces of natural cheese (such as Cheddar)</li> <li>• 2 ounces of processed cheese (such as American)</li> </ul>	2 or 3*	2 or 3*	2 or 3*
<b>Meat and Beans Group (Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs, and Nuts)— preferably lean or low fat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2–3 ounces of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish</li> </ul> These count as 1 ounce of meat: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ cup of cooked dry beans or tofu</li> <li>• 2½ ounce soyburger</li> <li>• 1 egg</li> <li>• 2 tablespoons of peanut butter</li> <li>• ⅓ cup of nuts</li> </ul>	2, for a total of 5 ounces	2, for a total of 6 ounces	3, for a total of 7 ounces

\* Older children and teens ages 9 to 18 years and adults over age 50 need 3 servings daily; others need 2 servings daily.

\*\* This includes lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk products. Soy-based beverages with added calcium are an option for those who prefer a non-dairy source of calcium.

## Chart 2. Sample food portions larger than 1 Pyramid serving

This list shows the size of a portion you may choose or be served. They are *not* recommendations. This chart compares these portions to Pyramid servings, so that you can judge how they might fit into your overall daily eating plan.

Food	Sample portion you receive	Compare to Pyramid serving size	Approximate Pyramid servings in this portion
<b>Grains Group</b>			
Bagel	1 bagel 4½" in diameter (4 ounces)	½ bagel 3" in diameter (1 ounce)	4
Muffin	1 muffin 3½" in diameter (4 ounces)	1 muffin 2½" in diameter (1½ ounces)	3
English muffin	1 whole muffin	½ muffin	2
Sweet roll or cinnamon bun	1 large from bakery (6 ounces)	1 small (1½ ounces)	4
Pancakes	4 pancakes 5" in diameter (10 ounces)	1 pancake 4" in diameter (1½ ounces)	6
Burrito-sized flour tortilla	1 tortilla 9" in diameter (2 ounces)	1 tortilla 7" in diameter (1 ounce)	2
Individual bag of tortilla chips	1¾ ounces	12 tortilla chips (¾ ounce)	2
Popcorn	16 cups (movie theatre, medium)	2 cups	8
Hamburger bun	1 bun	½ bun	2
Spaghetti	2 cups (cooked)	½ cup (cooked)	4
Rice	1 cup (cooked)	½ cup (cooked)	2
<b>Vegetable Group</b>			
Baked potato	1 large (7 ounces)	1 small (2¼ ounces)	3
French fries	1 medium order (4 ounces)	½ cup, 10 French fries (1 ounce)	4
<b>Meat and Beans Group</b>			
Broiled chicken breast	6 ounces	2 to 3 ounces	2
Fried chicken	3 pieces (7 to 8 ounces)	2 to 3 ounces	3
Broiled fish	6 to 9 ounces	2 to 3 ounces	3
Sirloin steak	8 ounces (cooked, trimmed)	2 to 3 ounces	3
Porterhouse steak or prime rib	13 ounces (cooked, trimmed)	2 to 3 ounces	5
Ham or roast beef (in deli sandwich)	5 ounces	2 to 3 ounces	2
Tuna salad (in deli sandwich)	6 ounces	2 to 3 ounces	2

### How can you follow Pyramid recommendations?

Let's go back to the spaghetti dinner. In this example, you know that you should have 6 daily servings from the Grains group. Before dinner, you estimate that you have already had 3 Grains group servings. So, only 3 more servings would meet your recommended intake. To keep to 3 servings, you eat only one slice of garlic bread. When you see the large plate of spaghetti, you set aside half on your plate and ask for a "doggie bag" to take it home. Then, the following would have been your choices from the Grains group over the day:

Meal	Grains Group portions	=	Pyramid Grains Group servings
Breakfast	½ cup of oatmeal	=	1 serving
Lunch	1 hamburger bun	=	2 servings
Dinner	1 slice of garlic bread	=	1 serving
Dinner	1 cup of spaghetti	=	2 servings
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>4 portions</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>6 servings</b>

In 4 sensible portions, you have consumed your recommended 6 servings of grains. Note that an active man may need about 2,800 calories each day. Checking chart 1, this man's Grains group recommendation would be 11 servings per day. The full spaghetti dinner might fit easily within his recommended food choices for the day.

*One key to making wise food choices is knowing how much you **are** eating, as well as how much you **should** eat.* This is especially important if you are trying to lose weight or manage your weight.

### Tips to help you choose sensible portions

#### When eating out:

- Choose a "small" or "medium" portion. This includes main dishes, side dishes, and beverages as well. Remember that water is always a good option for quenching your thirst.
- If main dish portions are larger than you want, order an appetizer or side dish instead, or share a main dish with a friend.
- Resign from the "clean your plate club"—when you've eaten enough, leave the rest. If you can chill the extra food right away, take it home in a "doggie bag."
- Ask for salad dressing to be served "on the side" so you can add only as much as you want.
- Order an item from the menu instead of the "all-you-can-eat" buffet.

#### At home:

- Once or twice, measure your typical portion of foods you eat often. Use standard measuring cups. This will help you estimate the portion size of these foods and similar foods.
- Be especially careful to limit portions of foods high in calories, such as cookies, cakes, other sweets, and fats, oils, and spreads.
- Try using a smaller plate for your meal.
- Put sensible portions on your plate at the beginning of the meal, and don't take "seconds."

### Don't be fooled by large portions

Many items sold as single portions actually provide 2 or more Pyramid servings. For example, a large bagel may actually be equal to 3 or 4 servings from the Grains group. A restaurant portion of steak may be more than the recommended amount for the whole day. Chart 2 [page 4] lists other common examples of foods that are often sold or prepared in portions larger than 1 Pyramid serving.

## Nutrition Facts label serving sizes

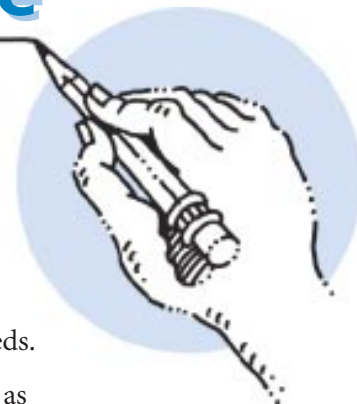
The serving sizes listed on the *Nutrition Facts label* may be different from *Food Guide Pyramid* serving sizes. Many Pyramid serving sizes are smaller than those on the Nutrition Facts label. For example, 1 serving of cooked cereal, rice, or pasta is 1 cup for the label but only ½ cup for the Pyramid.

Use the Nutrition Facts label to make nutritional comparisons of similar products. *The label serving size is not meant to tell you how much to eat, but to help identify nutrients in a food and to make product comparisons easier.* To compare the calories and nutrients in two foods, first check the serving size and the number of servings in the package. Serving sizes are provided in familiar units, such as cups or pieces.

## The Bottom Line

Choosing sensible portions is a key to controlling calorie intake and getting or keeping your weight in a healthy range. What is sensible for you?

- Each day, choose the recommended amount from the five Pyramid food groups—depending on your calorie needs.
- A Pyramid serving may not be the same as the portion you choose to eat—compare to find out how many servings are in your portion.
- Keep sensible portions in mind at restaurants as well as at home.



## Dietary Guidelines for Americans

The Dietary Guidelines offer sound advice that will help to promote your health and reduce your risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease, certain cancers, diabetes, stroke, and osteoporosis. The 10 Guidelines are grouped into the ABC's of nutrition:



### A: Aim for fitness

- Aim for a healthy weight.
- Be physically active each day.

### B: Build a healthy base

- Let the Pyramid guide your food choices.
- Choose a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains.
- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Keep food safe to eat.

### C: Choose sensibly

- Choose a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol and moderate in total fat.
- Choose beverages and foods to moderate your intake of sugars.
- Choose and prepare foods with less salt.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

To order Dietary Guidelines publications, call 888-878-3256. Ask for the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (40-page bulletin, \$4.75 per copy) or *Using the Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (5-panel brochure, \$.50 per copy).

You can also find out more about the Guidelines and download these publications by visiting USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion website at [www.cnpp.usda.gov](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov).



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