



Food portions



Health



Wellness



Nutrition



Support

Introduction

Most of us probably don't think about portion size when we eat. It usually depends on what type of meal we're having, how hungry we feel and how much is in a pack or on a plate.

But having a balanced diet is about getting the right types of food and drinks in the right amounts, and using your own hands as a guide can be an easy way to check the size of your portions.

Contents

Introduction	2
Portion sizes	3
Fruit	3
Vegetables	3
Juices and smoothies	3
Potatoes	3
Pasta and rice	4
Bread	4
Cereals and oats	4
Red and processed meat	4
Beans, lentils and chickpeas	4
Poultry and fish	5
Nuts and seeds	5
Cheese	5
Butter and spreads	5
Milk and milk alternatives	5
Yoghurt	6
Oils	6
Water	6
Final thought	6



Portion sizes

The simplest way to measure portion sizes is to use our own hands as a guide.

Because we all need different portion sizes for every meal, this helps us when planning for the whole family.

Note: The following guide separates the foods and drinks that **should** form part of a healthy balanced diet. There is no recommended portion size for treats like crisps, chocolate or cakes and we should try to keep portions and volumes of these as low and as limited as possible.

Fruit

Whole fruit is an essential part of a healthy diet and you should not be put off by the amount of sugar it contains if you're only having two to three portions a day.

One portion of fruit is around the same size as the palm of your hand. For example: an apple, orange or banana. Smaller fruits such as raspberries or blueberries should be limited to one handful, while larger fruits like mango and pineapple should be sliced up and saved for later.

Vegetables

Just like fruit, vegetables are an essential part of a healthy diet, and because vegetables are lower in natural sugars we can eat larger portion sizes.

A portion of vegetables should be around two cupped handfuls. Any veg counts, try to mix it up and choose a range of colours as this means you'll be getting a wider range of nutrients.

Juices and smoothies

Because juices and smoothies have been blended, they are easy to drink and, as such, we can easily consume more than the recommended amount. We should limit ourselves to one small glass (around 150ml) per day.

Potatoes

One potato that fits in your hand, or a handful of baby potatoes, should be counted as one portion. Eat with the skin for extra fibre and enjoy mashed, roasted or as a baked potato.

We do not need to be worried about eating potatoes, but consider the cooking method and the amount of oil used. Potatoes sliced into chips and baked with a portion of oil is a healthy choice, particularly compared with chips or fries from a deep fryer.



Pasta and rice

One handful of uncooked rice or pasta will make one portion. Rice and pasta both absorb water and grow in size when cooked, so after cooking one portion will be around two handfuls.

Ideally you should choose wholegrain varieties for extra fibre, but white pasta is fine if you prefer it - so long as you stick to the recommended portion size.

Bread

One portion of bread is two medium-sized slices.

Again, choose wholegrain or seeded versions if possible. Bread is a healthy food but easy to overeat in different forms, especially when enjoyed as an addition to a meal (e.g. garlic bread or naan).

Cereals and oats

One portion of cereals is about the same size as two handfuls.

Many cereals contain lots of added sugars and should be limited as much as possible. Wheat biscuits and other wholegrain cereals are better choices.

Oats contain no additional ingredients unless bought in ready-to-eat pots and are a good choice for a filling breakfast or as a snack with some yoghurt and fruit.

Red and processed meat

Red and processed meats contain high levels of saturated fat. One portion should be the same size as the palm of your hand to help reduce fat intake.

Red meat is very often served at more than double the recommended portion size, so if we do eat large portions it's important to remember it counts as two portions or more. This can be balanced by reducing the number of days you eat red meat and by choosing alternatives such as poultry, beans or fish.

Beans, lentils and chickpeas

One portion of beans, lentils or chickpeas is around the same as two cupped handfuls.

These foods are a great source of natural protein, are low in fat and contain lots of fibre.

Some people are not sure how to cook with beans, but they can be added to any meal and usually need around 10 minutes to be cooked enough to be soft to eat.

Poultry and Fish

One portion of fish and poultry is the same size as your full hand.

Fish contains healthy fats and omega 3s that are essential for us to get in our diets, especially for anyone who is pregnant to support the growing baby's development. Try to have two portions of fish every week if you can.

Chicken and turkey are also lower in saturated fat and make a good alternative to red meat.

Nuts and Seeds

One portion of nuts or seeds is the same as what fits in the palm of one hand.

Although higher in fat, nuts and seeds have lots of healthy unsaturated fats, fibre and other nutrients and can be enjoyed as part of a healthy diet.

Avoid salted and flavoured versions which add extra ingredients that are not part of a balanced diet.

Cheese

This one never seems to go down well! One portion of cheese is just two thick slices the same size as your thumb, or a small handful or grated cheese.

Cheese is quite easily overeaten, with thick slices and often covering main meals, and restaurant and takeaway portions don't help. Try using grated cheese to help control portions, and choose lower fat alternatives where you can.

Butter and spreads

One portion is the same as the tip of your thumb. Where possible, choose vegetable or olive spreads to reduce saturated fat.

Milk and milk alternatives

Milk contains calcium and other essential nutrients, but choose semi-skimmed or skimmed for lower levels of fat. Also look out for added sugars in oat and soya drinks and try to choose fortified versions.

Milk helps a child grow and develop and resist infections. Children should have a 350ml glass of whole milk daily from the age of 1, and switch to semi-skimmed once they turn 2. Their recommended dairy intake could also come from foods like cheese and yoghurt.

Like fruit juices, milk is easy to drink in high quantities so is best limited to one small 150ml glass, or around the same amount with cereal and in porridge.



Yoghurt

Like milk, natural or Greek yoghurt is a great source of calcium and other nutrients. One portion is three spoonfuls or, if you can, imagine a handful of yoghurt in a bowl!

Be aware of added sugars and other ingredients. Lower fat alternatives are available, but again be wary of what's been added in.

Oils

Vegetable and olive oils are recommended for cooking, or drizzled over salads and pasta. They contain healthy fats but are easy to overeat.

Whether cooking or as part of a meal, one portion should be the same size as the tip of your thumb, or one teaspoon.

Water

Water is essential in a healthy diet and we should drink 6-8 medium-sized glasses (around 1.8 to 2 litres) every day.

Final thought

Be aware of portion sizes when ordering food from takeaways or restaurants as portions are almost always above the recommendations to help keep you healthy. This is just one reason why eating out-of-home foods can be bad for our health.

If you would like to learn more or require more information and support, please get in touch!

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