



Portions, Patterns and Plate Size: Simple Changes to Shrink Your Waistline

Most of us have tried a diet or two (or three). We know that diets can be hard to follow and the temptation to “cheat” or go off the diet can be overwhelming. So, what to do? You may need to lose weight but it seems almost impossible. Perhaps it’s time to change HOW MUCH you eat rather than WHAT you eat. And, that may be easier than you think, according to research conducted by Dr. Brian Wansink at Cornell University.

It turns out that the amounts or portions we eat are influenced more by what surrounds us — like the people, packages, plates and cups, colors and shapes, etc. — than by our hunger levels. By observing people in his lab, Wansink studied the many ways we mindlessly eat. Here are some of the things that encourage us to eat more than we should, and some tips for counteracting these effects:

At Home or Away, Large Plates, Bowls, and Packages Equal Large Portions — and More Calories.

- Try using a plate that is no more than 10 inches across and a glass that is skinny and tall rather than short and wide. You will serve yourself less and the food will look more plentiful.
- Eat from a plate, and drink from a glass, not from a bag or a bottle. When you see your portions on a plate or a bowl, it can change how much you eat.
- ALWAYS check serving sizes on packaged foods and drinks. You may be surprised at how many packages look like they have only one serving but may have two or more.
- If food is being served “family style” or in serving dishes on the table, use serving dishes and spoons that are on the smaller side.
- Serve yourself when eating or drinking: take just enough, you can always go back for more.

Most People Follow a “See Food” Diet.

- If it’s in sight, you’ll tend to reach for it regardless of whether you’re hungry — especially if it looks and smells good.
- At home, put foods you want to eat less of away in cupboards and in the back of the refrigerator, and keep the foods you want to eat more of on the counter or at the front of the refrigerator.





- Rather than serving foods on the table “family style,” serve food from the kitchen. We eat more if the food is within reach, and having to walk even a few steps makes it more likely we’ll skip the second helping.
- At restaurants, ask for a take home container when your meal is served. Consider your hunger level, and immediately package what you don’t need to eat for another meal.

For more information about Environmental Influences on Portions (Brian Wansink):
<http://mindlesseating.org/index.php>.

