

Portion vs. Serving Size – What’s the difference?

The main idea of mindful eating is to become aware of the mind-body connection and the interaction that occurs when you nourish and feed your body. Portion size and serving size are two common phrases you hear when learning what and how much to eat. Although many people use them interchangeably, they have completely different meanings. Knowing the difference between the two can be important in maintaining and improving your health through mindful eating.

A serving size is what you are served. A portion size is what you actually eat. When you go to a restaurant and order an entree, the food you are brought is your serving size. If you only eat half and save half, that is the portion of food you have consumed.

Although it sounds straightforward, it gets tricky when experts tell us to eat a certain number of servings of different food groups each day and follow dietary guidelines. The USDA suggests amounts to avoid nutritional gaps and follow a diet that supports optimal health. A nutrition label describes a food in terms of a designated serving. But it can be difficult to know exactly how much or how large that serving size is. In this sense, portion sizes can be more important than serving sizes. Portion sizes reflect what we really eat and can vary depending on our individual health needs.

This is not to say serving sizes are not helpful. They can be a great way to gauge nutritional needs and intake for an average. Current USDA recommendations suggest two cups of fruit, two to three cups of vegetables, six ounces of grains, five to six ounces of protein, and three cups of dairy per day. Serving sizes on nutritional panels can sometimes be misleading. It is important to do your best to visualize the amount that the label indicates, and adjust portion sizes when needed.

Using serving size and portion sizes do not negate the principles of mindful eating. If you struggle with interpreting or listening to your body’s signals of what and how much to eat, they can be useful guides for supporting this practice and fostering positive healthy habits.

Resource:

USDA. (n.d.) *ChooseMyPlate*. Retrieved from <https://www.choosemyplate.gov>.

Source:

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