

Portions and Serving Sizes

A **portion** is the amount of food you *choose* to eat. There is no “standard” portion size—everyone consumes different amounts of food each time they eat. A **serving** is a defined, standard amount of food used to provide advice on how much to eat. It also helps identify the number of calories and nutrients in a serving of food.

Did you know the serving sizes found on “Nutrition Facts” food labels may be different from the Food Guide Pyramid serving sizes? In fact, many of the Pyramid servings are much smaller than those found on food labels. For some real-life examples, see the table below.

Portions vs. Food Guide Pyramid Servings

| Food | Typical Portion | Compare to Pyramid Serving Size | Approximate Pyramid Servings in this Portion |
|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Bagel | 1 bagel – 4 ½ inch | ½ bagel – 3 inch | 4 |
| Pancakes | 4 pancakes – 5 inch | 1 pancake – 4 inch | 6 |
| Baked potato | 1 large - 7 oz. | 1 small – 2 ¼ oz. | 3 |
| French fries | 1 reg. order – 4 oz. | ½ cup (10 fries) | 4 |
| Chicken breast | 6 oz. | 2-3 oz. | 2 |
| Fried chicken | 3 pieces – 8 oz. | 2-3 oz. | 3 |
| Sirloin steak | 8 oz. cooked/trimmed | 2-3 oz. | 3 |
| Hamburger bun | 1 bun | ½ bun | 2 |
| Spaghetti pasta | 2 cups, cooked | ½ cup, cooked | 4 |

It’s a good idea to rely on the Food Guide Pyramid for serving sizes versus Nutrition Facts food labels. The number of servings you should eat each day is based on your caloric need which is determined by your age, gender and activity level. Over the course of a day, try to eat the number of servings recommended for each food group. Use Nutrition Facts food labels to compare similar products. Just be sure to first check the serving size and number of servings in the package.

The next table shows the recommended number of daily servings of each food group for a person who consumes 2,000 calories/day. To find out how many calories you should consume and the number of servings that’s right for you, go to www.mypyramid.gov. This Web site is an excellent resource for healthy eating tips and physical activity ideas for people of all ages.

Recommended Number of Servings per Day – 2000 Calorie Diet

| GRAINS | VEGETABLES | FRUITS | DAIRY | MEAT & BEANS |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 oz. • (1 oz. is one slice of bread, one cup of dry cereal, or ½ cup of cooked rice, cereal, pasta) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 ½ cups • Eat more dark green and orange vegetables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 cups • Eat a variety of fruits – fresh, frozen, canned or dried • Go easy on fruit juices. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 cups • Choose low-fat dairy products. • If lactose intolerant, choose lactose-free products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 ½ oz • (A deck of cards is about a 4 oz. cut of meat.) • Choose lean meats and poultry. • Vary your proteins – fish/beans/nuts. |

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture. Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. April 2005.

