

Follow the Chisum Fitness Trail – Supersized

RE: Supersized Americans

The big buzz word within the fast food industry is the term, “Supersized”. The obviously marketed ploy presents this as the most cost-efficient option available. If my information is correct, the average overall manufacturer cost, per the larger serving size, is about 2 cents. Compared to the average increased cost for each customer, of between 39 and 59 cents, this represents a much greater bargain for the industry!

Americans have been socially embedded with the need to eat what they have purchased, or have been served. This extends to a negative concept of waste, or as disrespect to the person preparing the food, within an intimate setting.

There are several theories posted as to this reason, but most agree that it is a residual effect of the great depression and “dust bowl” eras of the 1920’s and 1930’s. Our grandparents transmitted this information from their personal experiences within these decades.

Three current research publications provide informative insight into the trends and implications from increased food portion sizes. Nielsen and Popkin (2003. JAMA), reviewed the alterations between the years 1977 and 1998. They measured the portion size of the following foods: pizza, desserts, soda, salty snacks, fruit drinks, hamburgers, French fries, cheeseburgers, and Mexican foods. This research included restaurants, fast food eateries, and amounts served at home.

The largest portion size difference was recorded in the fast-food industry. A close second was found in the home. The third, or in this case the least, was reported in restaurants. This was consistent in all foods, except pizza.

The overall increased individual serving size is broken down as follows: sodas by 94 Kcal, 93 Kcal for salty foods, hamburgers by 97 Kcal, French fries by 68 Kcal, and Mexican food by 133 Kcal. Again, this is representative of the averaged alteration for all three eating places.

Young and Nestle (2003. J. Am. Diet. Assoc.) focused upon the serving size in the fast-food chain industry. The increase, within the past three decades, was between 2 and 5 times larger than the original serving size. They also noted that their data indicates this is between 2 and 8 times larger than the recommended federal marketplace portions.

To adequately understand this information, view this from the standpoint of the total meal. Yes, the hamburgers have become larger than the original White Castle, or McDonald’s size, but 5 times? Talk about a “Whopper”! :-). The answer is, yes!

The original hamburgers from the fast food industry, in the mid 1950's, averaged approximately 1.6 to 2.4 ounces of meat. Today, this average is between 6.9 and 7.1 ounces. Now my math is not the very best, but it is awfully close to a 5-fold increase.

French fries have increased proportionally as well. In the 1950's, the average size was 1.6 ounces. Today they are 8.0 ounces. Again, this represents a 5-fold change in size.

The alterations, within the soft-drink portions, are about the same. The original size for a McDonald's drink was 7 ounces. Today the large sizes range between 44 and 64 ounces. This change is close to an 8-fold increase.

The energy density within these servings has increased, respective to the sizes. This would equate to a Supersized meal exceeding 2300 Kcal. Most females require less than 2000 Kcal, per day. Males average 2200 and 2800 Kcal, per day.

To understand the impact upon the potential storage of fat, 3500 Kcal equals one pound of fat. The additional energy consumed with the Supersized portions would equate to approximately 1.5 pounds gained for the female in one week. This is predicted upon one Supersized meal, per day, for each of the seven days of the week.

In a Danish study, Matthiessen et al. (2003. Public Health Nutr.), the authors noted the same problems within their country. They reported a larger increase in fast-food consumption during the past decade. The caloric-rich portion size was noted within the sales of soft drinks, sweets, ice creams, and chocolates.

It was very interesting to see that the people, who chose the low-fat options, consumed so much more of these foods, that the total caloric values and fats were consistent with the high-dense options. The people, within the study, felt they could eat more of these foods, and still reap the benefits of weight reduction.

In Conclusion: It only takes an additional 120 Kcal, per day, to gain a pound of fat, per month. This includes those foods with lower fat and calories.

I found it quite interesting that the portion sizes, within the home, were relatively close to the average for the fast-food industry. In essence, we are overeating in every venue within our society. From this data, it is understandable as to why we are experiencing an alarming increase in obesity across the United States.

The portion size difference is quite interesting. Due to the "psychological conditioning", it is difficult for Americans to adequately understand what would be a normal daily portion. For a simple example, the daily requirement for grains is 6 servings, yet only one bagel provides the total allotment.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Dr. Jack W. Chisum