

FEATURES

Eye on portion size

Top tips on how to remain in shape include knowing what kinds of food should be eaten each day

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If weight control is the goal, most folks know that portion control is the key.

According to a survey done by the Calorie Control Council, 84 percent of dieters say they are eating smaller portions of their favorite foods to control their weight. Or as the late Orson Welles, the Oscar-winning writer, actor and director, put it: "My doctor told me to stop having intimate dinners for four, unless there are three other people there."

But apparently we need a little help. An American Dietetic Association survey found more than half of folks like to think big when it comes to portions and overestimated the recommended serving sizes for many foods.

CALORIE NEEDS

What does "portion control" mean, anyway? It starts with understanding how many servings of each kind of food you should have a day based on your total caloric needs. That can change with level of physical activity. If you move more, you get to eat a larger portion.

BAGEL TRAP?

Think that grabbing a bagel for breakfast counts as one grain serving? Probably not. It depends on the portion or size of said bagel. For instance, the typical deli/bakery bagel is about 140g, so if you should only be eating 6 (30g) servings of grains per day, then that big bagel is gobbling up your budget.

QUICK TIPS FOR DINING OUT

Check out the room. If you can't tell much about the portion size when reading the menu or from the server, look at what others are being served. Then you'll know that the mashed potatoes are enough for three people or to ask for more green beans if the portion looks too small.

A serving of butter is the same as a serving of olive oil. Olive oil and butter contain the same number of calories per teaspoon. So don't get a larger portion of olive oil just because it's heart-healthy if you're trying to trim calories.

Cooked weights are often lower than quoted on the menu. This is good news. Restaurants list raw weight of meats on the menu. A 200g filet mignon will shrink when grilled, often by 25 percent, so the cooked portion is actually 150g.

Plan your next meal. If portions are too big, ask for half to be put in a takeout container before the plate comes to your table. You won't be tempted to eat the whole thing and, because you haven't pushed them around your plate, the leftovers will look and taste better.

HOW MUCH SHOULD I EAT?

HEALTHY ADULT MALE (PHYSICALLY ACTIVE 30 MINUTES MOST DAYS)

2,600 calories
GRAINS: 250g
VEGETABLES: 3 half cups (more is encouraged)
FRUIT: 4 cups
MILK: 3 cups (low-fat or fat-free)

MEAT AND BEANS: 180g
FATS/OILS: 8 teaspoons

HEALTHY ADULT FEMALE (PHYSICALLY ACTIVE FOR 30 MINUTES MOST DAYS)

2,000 calories
GRAINS: 170g
VEGETABLES: 2 half cups (more is encouraged)
FRUIT: 2 cups
MILK: 3 cups (low-fat or fat-free)
MEAT AND BEANS: 150g
FATS/OILS: 6 teaspoons

The more calories you burn through physical activity, the more servings you get to add to this chart. If you want to lose weight, you have to cut the amount you consume from the chart. Go to www.mypyramid.gov to reveal the caloric level and number of servings recommended for you.

VISUALIZE THIS

MEAT OR POULTRY: 80g equals a deck of cards or the palm of your hand.

SALAD DRESSING: 2 tablespoons equals a shot glass.

PASTA OR RICE, COOKED: 1 cup equals a baseball or a tight fist.

HARD CHEESE: 30g equals 4 dice.

PANCAKE/WAFFLE: 10cm equals the diameter of a CD.

CHEESE SLICE, DELI MEAT: 30g equals the diameter of a CD.

NUTS, DRIED FRUIT, GRANOLA: A quarter cup equals a golf ball.

VEGGIES, BERRIES: 1 cup equals a baseball or a tight fist.



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[SCIENCE]

Nostalgic tendencies

The elderly filter out negative memories, a scientific study has revealed

BY KAY LAZAR
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As we get older, our brain manages to dismiss negative memories but retain the positive ones.

In the 1973 film *The Way We Were*, Barbra Streisand sings a haunting ballad about memories and aging. "What's too painful to remember, we simply choose to forget," the song goes.

Now, research suggests that the song was essentially right, and illustrates just how the brain manages to dismiss negative memories but retain the positive ones as we get older.

A team of researchers from Duke University and University of Alberta took two groups of volunteers — one in their mid-20s, one in their 70s — and showed them photos that were either neutral or very negative, depicting such things as mutilated bodies or sick children. Later, the participants were unexpectedly asked to recall the images. The older group had a harder time recalling the negative images than the younger group, and brain scans revealed the differences in brain activity between the two groups.

The study — which points to possible ways to improve memory in aging adults — appears in the January issue of *Psychological Science*. Peggy St Jacques, the Duke University graduate student in psychology and cognitive neuroscience who is the lead author, said there are primal reasons why seniors tend to take a dim view of unpleasant memories.

"As we age, we have a more limited perspective of the time we have left," she said, "so we may focus more on things that increase our emotional well-being."

In practical terms, that might mean that an older person's memory of the family reunion will focus on the delights of the grandchildren playing on the lawn, not the shouting match at lunch over their divorcing parents' custody battle. Or on the glow of the sunset over the dunes, not the litter scattered across the sand.

"Not everything that happens with aging is negative," says Gene Cohen, director of the center on aging, health and humanities at George Washington University.

There are related advantages, he notes: People develop "longer fuses," and are better able to control and regulate anger and other negative emotions. "The highs may be just as high, but the lows are not as low," he said. And people with certain conditions such as social phobias often find their illnesses diminishing with age, Cohen said.

St Jacques's study is not the first to show how the aging brain filters out the negative.

Other scientists, most notably Stanford University psychologist Laura Carstensen, have also demonstrated that seniors tend to remember more positive than negative events. And still other research has revealed that in brain scans the amygdala, the brain's emotion detector, lights up equally intensely in young and old while viewing positive events, yet does not light up as brightly or as long in older people when they view negative images.

But St Jacques's study, while small in the number of participants — there were 15 people in each group — is the first to trace the pathway of an emotional memory in the brain as it is formed, and to look at the age-related differences.

Brain scans taken while the participants viewed the pictures revealed that while both groups had similar activity in the brain's emotional center, they differed when it came to how the centers interacted with the rest of the brain. Younger people were connecting more with another region of their brain typically associated with learning and memory, known as the hippocampus, while older adults relied more on a portion involved in controlling emotions, called the frontal cortex.

That control center, said St Jacques, helps seniors filter out or reappraise unpleasant images as they form memories.

The brain's forget-the-bad-retain-the-good memory function appears gradually as we age. One 2005 study by Carstensen, the Stanford psychologist, showed that the phenomenon was only slightly more pronounced in participants, age 41 to 53, than in the younger volunteers. But the differences grew more striking for the 65 to 80 group. The elders were only able to recall about half of the negative and neutral images compared to their young counterparts.

Such research, said Molly Wagster, a senior brain scientist at the National Institute on Aging, offers tantalizing clues for developing drugs and designing treatments to improve memory in aging adults.

"With this, we come closer to better understanding the changes in the brain with age, and how we can capitalize on that," Wagster said.

For instance, she said, the latest finding reinforces the hypothesis that older adults may do a better job recalling information if it is delivered with emotionally pleasant or positive images.

One potential area for future study, said St Jacques, is to investigate whether the age-related differences in the brain that scientists witnessed in the latest study are the same when older adults are asked to recall not recent memories, but those from years earlier, especially from their childhood or during young adulthood. Those memories would have been formed when the connections were more intense between the brain's emotional center and the region involved with learning and memory, which would suggest that they might be more easily remembered, even the negative ones.

But St Jacques isn't sure.

Older adults might also engage emotional regulation processes that would dampen their emotional response when they retrieve these very remote, negative memories," she said. "Thus, we might expect there to be similar age-related differences" here, too.