

Portion control key to keeping holiday weight gain at bay

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Interested in keeping the pounds off this holiday season? A nutrition expert at Washington University in St. Louis has some very simple tips for remembering accurate portion sizes, which may be even more important than the food choices you make.

"Healthy food choices are paramount, especially during the holidays," says Connie Diekman, RD, director of University Nutrition and immediate past president of the American Dietetic Association. "But if you don't pay attention to portion sizes, healthy food options aren't going to help you lose weight on their own."

While many of us know that consuming an extra-large hamburger is less healthy than eating a chicken sandwich, recognizing a good portion size can be more challenging, especially when dining out or at a holiday party.

How do you know how much you should eat?

It's as easy as looking at your own hand, says Diekman.

According to her, a woman's fist is about the size of one cup. The tip of the thumb is about the size of an ounce. The flat outstretched hand is about the size of three or four ounces of meat, fish or poultry. Or six ounces if the piece is a little thicker.

"Your hand can give you an easy, quick reference to glance at, especially

if you are dining out," Diekman says. "Most adults should eat between five and seven ounces of meat, fish or poultry per day, not per meal. And a cup or cup and a half of pasta or potatoes is a normal portion, not three cups. We should also be getting around two cups a day of both fruits and vegetables and three cups of dairy."

Another great way to keep portions in control is to remember that two-thirds of your plate should be filled with fruits, vegetables or whole grains. The final third should be meat, fish or poultry. "Put sensible portions on your plate at the beginning of the meal and don't go back for seconds," Diekman says.

She suggests that when eating out, decide right away how much of your entrée you are going to eat and have the take-out box brought immediately.

"If you look at your plate and realize the meat portion is larger than your hand, cut it in half," she says. "If the pasta portion is overflowing the plate, it could easily be three cups or more. Put half of it in the box. Not only will you be controlling your portion size, you'll have delicious leftovers for lunch the following day."

Portions are just as important, and in some cases more important, than the food you choose, Diekman says.

"Even if you choose the healthy option, a six-ounce chicken breast for example, and you eat that twice a day, you've nearly doubled what you should be consuming."

Diekman also suggests going to mypyramid.gov, which has pictures of proper portion sizes.

She talks about other ways to measure portion sizes using common

household items in this additional video, available here for Mac users and here for PC users.

Video: Connie Diekman discusses easy tricks you can do to monitor your food portions. [\[large\]](#) [\[small\]](#)

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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