The American waistline is expanding! There has been a significant increase in the rates of obesity among both children and adults. Research shows two-thirds of American adults are overweight or obese and that number is expected to grow to 86% by 2030.\(^1\) Obesity is a leading contributor to a variety of serious and chronic health issues, including heart disease, diabetes and hypertension. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that costs attributed to obesity and overweight accounted for 9.1% of medical expenditures and may have reached as high as $78.5 billion in 1998 and $92.6 billion in 2002.\(^3\)

A worksite wellness program that focuses on healthy lifestyle is ideal for organizations that want to make a difference within the population. Helping employees learn about proper serving sizes is one way that organizations can help. People spend a large portion of their time at work and the workplace environment can influence the health and choices of its employees.

Portion sizes have been increasing since the 1970s. Most marketplace portions are larger today than U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) standard servings.\(^4\) Increased portion sizes promote excessive intake of calories at meals. Even the size of our plate has grown! The surface area of the average dinner plate has increased 36% since 1960.\(^5\) One study found that adults served themselves 30% more cereal in a larger bowl than in a smaller bowl.\(^6\)

Portion distortion has also hit home cookbooks. A study of 18 recipes continuously published in “The Joy of Cooking” since 1936 found that the average calories per serving have jumped 63% in the past 70 years.\(^7\) According to researcher Brian Wansink, Ph.D., “What served four people in 1986 would have served almost seven people by 1936 standards.”

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Engage Individuals in Creative Ways

Use the ideas below to help employees learn about smart servings, think about their habits and obtain support. Be creative with ways to get employees to join the fun! Changing individual behavior is a challenge, but by working in groups, individuals can support and encourage each other, leading to better results for all. Consider introducing friendly competition and teamwork in the Mix Six for Better Health program.

- Make the Mix Six for Better Health Smart Servings Worksheets available to employees.
- Include Smart Servings articles in your employee newsletters. Several options are provided.

Set up an Interactive Single-Size Display

Set up a display table in a cafeteria, break room or meeting place. Display a backdrop or poster of the following:

**Is This You?**

- 54% of Americans seek to finish everything on their plates
- Many people eat more than they think
- People eat more food off of large plates than small plates, but feel equally full (Wansink, et.al., Obesity Research 2005)

_Smart Servings Matter! Enjoy less more often with single servings on smaller plates._

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Display the following foods:

**What is your serving?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A single serving (Suggested display items below)</th>
<th>vs.</th>
<th>What you take from a bag or package</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ounce bag of chips</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>1 large bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 individual box of cereal</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>1 large box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ounce dry roasted peanuts</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>1-3 ounce bowl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ounce (16) thin wheat crackers</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>1 large box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 mini cake donuts</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>1 bag</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having an interactive display has greater impact than just listing label serving sizes. Have a plate available and allow employees to serve out (from containers) and weigh or measure what they might normally eat. Using the nutrition facts label, have them compare the calories, fat, and sugar in their serving to the single serving displayed. Ask employees to think about the foods they normally eat from a bag (or container) and set goals to put those foods on a plate or in a bowl instead.
Conduct a Portion Distortion Quiz

If a computer is available, set it up to display the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institutes’ Portion Distortion Quiz (http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion/). Staff the display to facilitate the questions and answers given in the quiz.

If a computer is not available, one option is to print and post the questions on the front side of a poster board and their answers on the flip side.

Suggest that individuals refer to MyPyramid (www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/index.html) for information about food choices and the amounts that are right for them.

Set up a “Little Changes Make a Big Difference” Display

Display or create a display or bulletin board the ways little changes can make big differences. For the display, use actual serving sizes of different foods. For a bulletin board, use photos or just descriptions.

**Serving Size Display Suggestions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serving Size</th>
<th>A Little Less</th>
<th>Calories &amp; Fat Saved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 ounce mocha (2% milk)</td>
<td>8 ounce mocha (2% milk)</td>
<td>70 cal – ½ tsp. fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ounce potato chips (30-45)</td>
<td>1 ounce potato chips (10-15)</td>
<td>306 cal – 5 tsp. fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ounce cheese puffs</td>
<td>1 ounce cheese puffs</td>
<td>160 cal – 2 ½ tsp. fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ½ inch square brownie</td>
<td>2 ½ inch square brownie</td>
<td>83 cal – 1 tsp. fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large french fries</td>
<td>Medium french fries</td>
<td>117 cal – 1 ½ tsp. fat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference & Starbucks®

Display Household Items to Demonstrate Serving Size

Using the Serving Sizes Poster (http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/howmuch.pdf) as a guide, create a display in the cafeteria or an eating area. Use the “everyday” household items identified on the poster to visually demonstrate portion sizes.

For each household item displayed, attach a serving size descriptor card. Another option is to withhold descriptor cards and have employees guess the serving size represented by the item. For example, ask about the number of ounces of meat represented by a computer mouse, or the part of a cup that is represented by a baseball.
Connect with the Community: Lunch and Learn about Smart Servings

Invite a local chef, nutritionist or cookbook author to provide recipes and cooking tips and help employees learn about Smart Servings.

Add Work Site Smart Servings Options

Become a champion for employees to make healthy eating choices in the workplace and at home. Make employees partners for change by welcoming and encouraging healthy change ideas and feedback.

- Offer smart-sized items that are lower in calories, fat and sugar in vending machines. For example, offer an 8- or 12-ounce can rather than a 20-ounce bottle of soft drink.

- Ensure that appropriate serving sizes of food are being served at the cafeteria. Super-sized meals or items are not appropriate.

- Encourage adequate time for lunch and breaks. There is greater potential for overeating when employees are distracted, rushing or eating while working.

- Provide smart-sized foods at meetings, training, office parties and other work-related events. For example, small-sized bagels.

- Display Smart Servings point-of-purchase information (label foods to show serving size and/or nutritional content) in the cafeteria and break rooms.

For more ideas, visit http://cigna.com/healthinfo/ud3719.html#ud3720.


Non food-related environmental stimuli induce increased meal intake in healthy women: comparison of television viewing versus listening to a recorded story in laboratory settings, F. Bellisle, A. M. Dalix and G. Slama.

Brian Wansink, Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think, Bantam, 2006.