

Downsizing Food Portions

The size of American meal portions and dinnerware has been growing. So have many waistlines! During the 1900's a typical dinner plate grew about three inches, going from approximately 9" to 12" in diameter. The amount of overweight people has also grown to a national obesity epidemic.

Recent research suggests that downsizing dinnerware may help with portion control. In their forthcoming Journal of Consumer Research article titled "Plate Size and Color Suggestibility: The Delboeuf Illusion's Bias on Serving and Eating Behavior," Koert Van Ittersum and Brian Wansink describe what is known as the Delboeuf Illusion. The Illusion is the "perceived difference in the size of two identical circles when one of the circles was surrounded by a much larger circle and the other one was surrounded by only a slightly larger circle" (p.4).

To demonstrate this, cut out two identical circles. Place one on a white 7" plate and the other on a white 12" plate. The circle on the smaller plate should appear to be larger than the circle on the larger plate. See the attached photo.

The researchers think that the Delboeuf Illusion may influence the amount of food that is served. People tend to put larger portions on larger plates and smaller portions on smaller plates. To aid in portion control, some nutrition experts are recommending the use of smaller plates. For example, the authors of the Ohio State University Extension "Choose It, Use It" curriculum recommend that children use 7" plates and adults use 9" plates.

Below are some food portion activities to do with your Cloverbuds.

- ☺ Show the Cloverbuds the photo of the Delboeuf Illusion. Which black circle appears larger? Both black circles are identical in size. Show the Cloverbuds the photo of the larger 12" and smaller 7" plates with identical amounts of food on them. Which plate appears to have more food on it? Additional pictures comparing food portions and calorie content of 20 years ago with today are available to print from www.choosemyplate.gov/supertracker-tools/portion-distortion.html.
- ☺ Borrow some of your grandparents' or great-grandparents' dinnerware or purchase some from a thrift store. Show the antique dinnerware and some current dinnerware to your Cloverbuds. Compare the sizes. Talk about how sizes have changed over the years. Many people from earlier generations also exercised more than we do today. It is not surprising that we weigh more than our ancestors did.
- ☺ Give each Cloverbud a white 7" paper plate. Fold the plate in half. Then, fold it in half again. Unfold the plate. The folds should divide the plate into quarters. Draw lines on the fold marks. Talk about the My Plate recommendations (see <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>) that one-fourth of the plate should be filled with each of the following: grains, protein, vegetables, and fruit. Ask the Cloverbuds to draw and color pictures of appropriate foods in each section of the plate. Encourage them to take their paper plate home and compare its size to their favorite plate.

Children's MyPlate coloring pages are available at <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>. Click on "Children (6-11 yrs)", then on "Kids Coloring Pages".

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