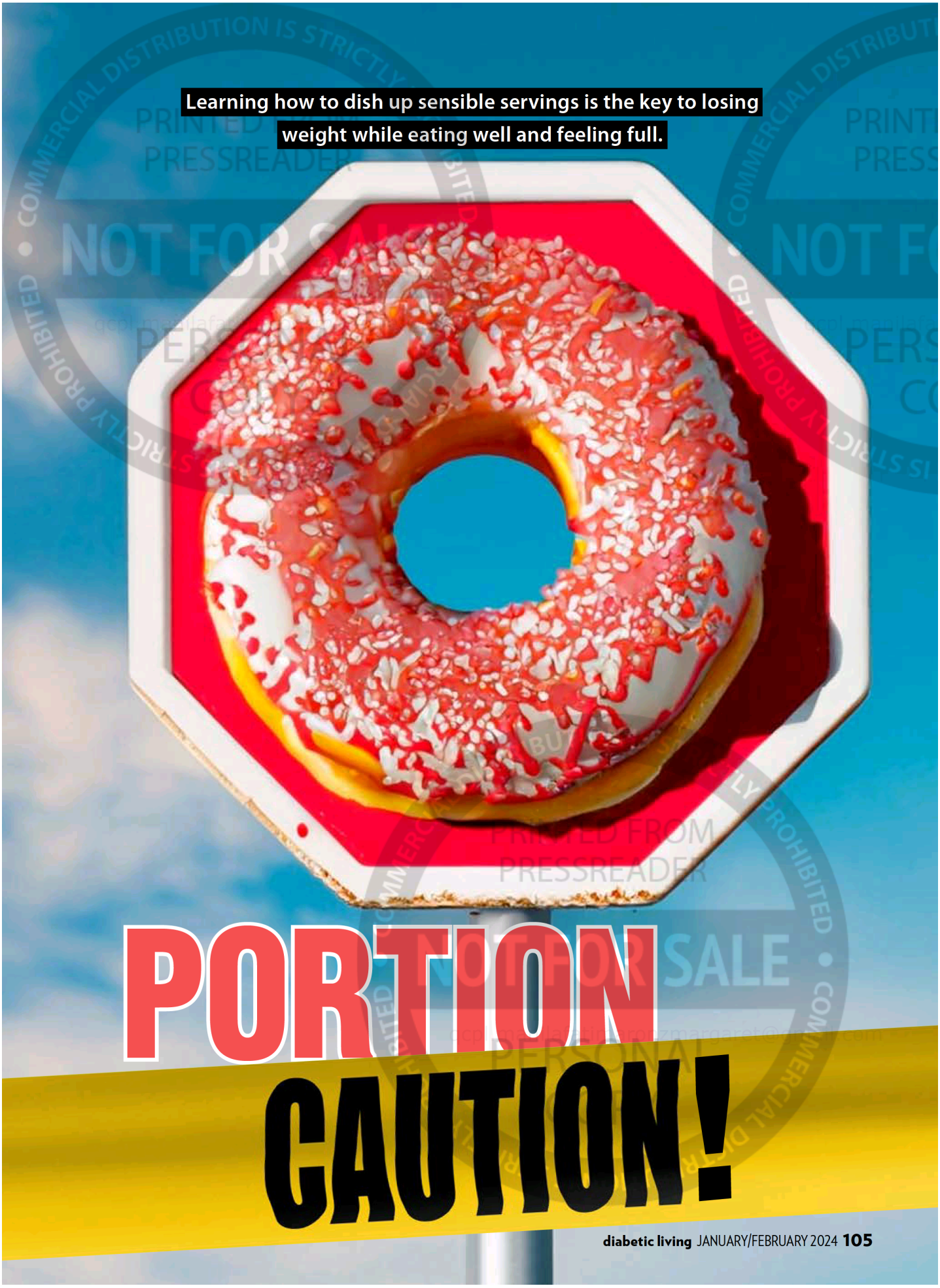
- Eating customs / Body weight



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In today's world of double-patty burgers, value meals and all-you-can-eat buffets, it's easy to forget what a sensible serving should look like. Counting kilojoules, carbs and fats is only part of the weight-loss equation. Even if you're choosing healthy foods, you could still be eating more than you need. Judging portion sizes by sight is an important technique that can help you when you're trying to lose weight. By simply downsizing some of your portions and increasing others, you can trim kilojoules from your plate and kilos from your frame without going hungry. Here are some tips...

Measure up

Check with a dietitian about how much you should eat, based on your weight, height and activity level. Ask for suggestions on portion sizes, then measure foods using scales, measuring cups or spoons. After two weeks, you'll have a good idea of how portions should look. Use the same-sized cup, plate and bowl every day, and you'll soon find that assigning yourself the right portion becomes automatic.

Eat out, don't blow out

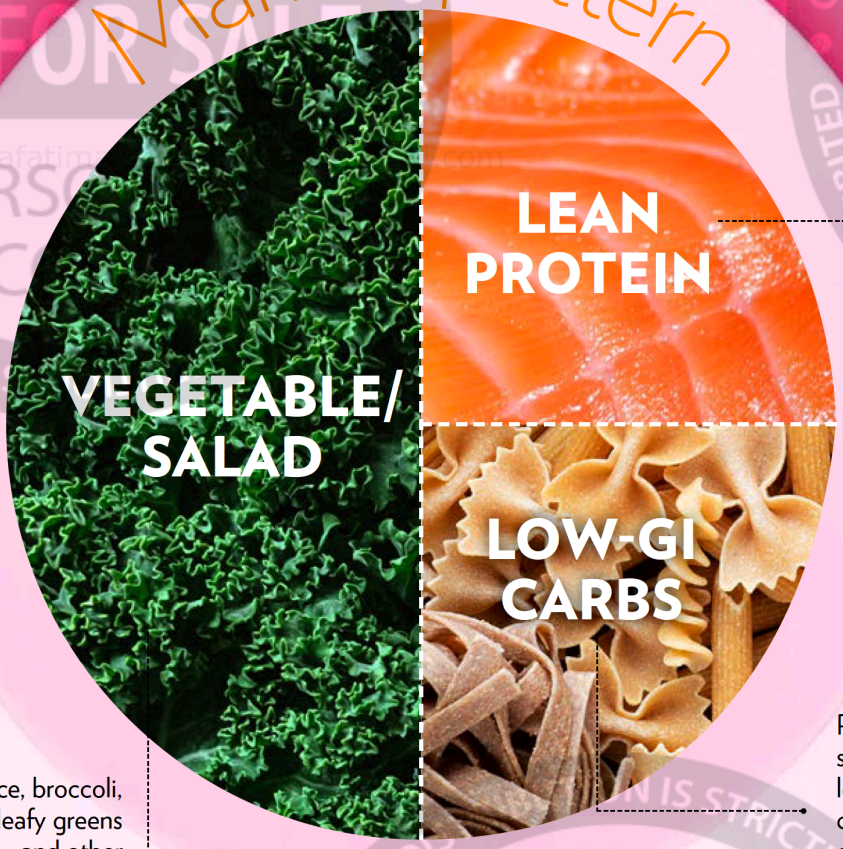
Eating out means surrendering some control over your food options. But there are strategies to help you make a smart choice. In a restaurant, making a selection that suits your dietary needs – choosing entrées with a side of salad greens or steamed vegetables instead of sizeable mains is one way to make sure you keep the balance right. Opting for a half-portion of a main is another. If you're faced with an all-you-can-eat buffet, give the options a swift once-over before you join the queue so you can identify the healthier foods. Follow the plate-pattern guide over the page to see how you can pile your plate wisely. Also, calculate your carb limits beforehand to keep your blood glucose levels in check. Most of all, remember that eating everything in sight is no bargain if it harms your health.

Eating at a friend's place means that, unless you give them advanced warning of your dietary needs, – fair enough when you have diabetes – you may find yourself faced with food that doesn't suit. Explaining your dietary limitations ahead of time can help your host to make an appropriate meal for you. Or, you can offer to bring a plate – a colourful salad, for instance – that will be a welcome addition to everyone's menu.

One strategy that will discourage overeating when you dine out is to have a nutritious snack beforehand, such as a bowl of low-carb vegetable soup or a large green salad – so you're not ravenous by the time you sit down at the restaurant.



Make a pattern



Fish, chicken breast or lean meat.

Lettuce, broccoli, tomato, leafy greens and other non-starchy vegies.

Pasta, quinoa, or starchy vegies and legumes such as corn, pumpkin or chickpeas.

TOO MUCH ON YOUR PLATE?

There's a simple way to control portions and ensure you get the ideal balance of nutrients with each meal – the plate-pattern method. Fill half of your plate with non-starchy vegetables such as lettuce, broccoli, tomato, cabbage or bok choy (these are the vegies that are light on kilojoules and have minimal blood glucose impact). Then, fill a quarter of the plate with low-GI starchy vegetables, such as corn, butternut pumpkin and parsnip, starchy legumes, such as chickpeas, soybeans or haricot beans, or a carbohydrate food such as pasta, Doongara rice or quinoa. Fill the final quarter with a lean protein food such as fish, chicken breast or lean meat. A cup of fruit or light dairy (milk, yoghurt or cheese) may go on the side. The key is to use the same pattern consistently when you prepare meals and to avoid piling your food higher than a deck of cards.

A GROWING TREND

In recent years, dinner plates have grown from 23cm to the more fashionable, restaurant-sized 27cm, which may explain the expanding Aussie waistline. What we should remember is that few restaurants utilise all this space – more likely, the larger the plate the smaller the serving. The trick at home is to fill only the inner rim of your plate – usually 20cm.

Wise up on your vegies

While vegetables are a nutritional powerhouse essential to a balanced diet, it's important to know the difference between starchy and non-starchy varieties – and how each affects your BGLs and weight.

STARCHY VEGETABLES AND LEGUMES

Starchy vegies, such as potatoes and parsnips, and legumes, such as chickpeas, have the same amount of carbohydrates as breads and cereals. Each portion (typically 1 cup) equals about 15g of carbohydrates, or one carb exchange. Aim to fill a quarter of your plate with these. Other foods in this category include all beans (baked, black, garbanzo, kidney, lima, pinto, white, navy), carrot, corn, lentils, mixed vegetables (with corn, peas or carrot) and sweet potato. As a protein and a carbohydrate, legumes are an alternative to lean meat, poultry and fish as well as the potato, pasta or rice on your plate.

NON-STARCHY VEGETABLES

Celery, tomato, lettuce and other non-starchy vegies are virtually carbohydrate free and kilojoule free, which means you can eat as many as you like. Dietitians recommend including five serves of vegetables a day (each about the size of your fist), and you should aim to fill half of your plate with these. Other vegetables in this category include artichoke, asparagus, green beans, beetroot, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, capsicum, cauliflower, cucumber, eggplant, leek, lettuce, mushroom, onion, radish, spinach, squash and zucchini.



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Pick one-portion packages

- Opt for single-serve packets if buying prepackaged foods – such as sultanas or diced fruit, nut and seed mixes – so you can easily check the kilojoule count.
- Plan ahead to avoid temptation when buying in bulk. Take the time to divide the snacks and put them in small bags so you always have a few options to hand.
- If you buy a pack of six chicken breasts or pork chops, freeze the ones you aren't using immediately.
- When cooking double portions of a recipe, freeze the extras immediately, so you won't be tempted to eat more than the ideal portion size.

Lend a hand

- When you're in a restaurant or supermarket and you want to make a snap judgement on portion size, there's nothing handier than... well, your hand.
- Your palm generally tallies with the ideal portion of cooked lean meat, fish or poultry (that's around 60g for children, 85g for women and 100g for men) you should have in a day.
- A fist equals about 1 cup, the equivalent of a serve of starchy vegetables or cereal, green salad or fresh fruit. Remember, you need five fist-sized servings of vegetables daily and two of fruit.
- The length of your thumb is roughly equivalent to 1 tablespoon, making it the ideal gauge for a serve of salad dressing.
- The tip of your thumb equates to about a ½ teaspoon – the amount of olive oil you should allow yourself for cooking (and a good reason to use it in spray form).

WORDS CONNIE CRAWLEY PHOTOGRAPHY GETTY IMAGES, DANIA WARMERDAM

Use visual reminders

When you're unsure of how big a portion should be, use everyday objects as your sizing yardstick.



How big a muffin? Think a large egg.

How much fresh fruit? Think a tennis ball.

How much avocado? Think a large car key.

How big a potato? Think a computer mouse.

How much salad? Think a cricket ball.

How much peanut butter? Think two marbles.

How many nuts? Think a golf ball.

How much cooked vegies? Think a fist.

How big a pancake? Think a CD.

How much cheese? Think a matchbox.

Stay in check

Controlling portion sizes and monitoring your blood glucose levels can add up to weight-loss success. The key is finding a system that works for you. These methods for estimating portion sizes work most of the time. However, you should, occasionally, measure your portions to make sure they aren't getting bigger. Try to make this a fortnightly ritual (or recheck if you notice that your BGLs are going up).