# UNDERSTANDING PORTION SIZES

NUTRITION

The UK is currently the most obese nation in Europe. At present, 60% of the UK population is overweight or obese. The availability of junk food, increase in processed foods and larger portion sizes all play a part in this problem.

Portion sizes of processed foods, such as ready meals, have gradually increased over the last 15 years; restaurant portion sizes have also grown and are now larger than ever. The result is that we are now used to eating bigger servings of food.
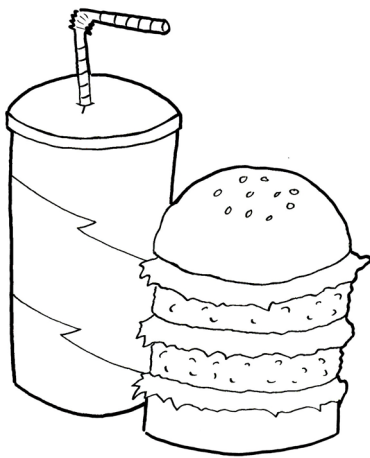
The option to "supersize" meals has become popular at many food outlets. This is when customers are encouraged to trade up to a larger meal than the one they've ordered, at little extra cost. As more people get used to eating these supersized portions of food, normal portion sizes start looking small in comparison. Bigger portions of food mean more calories, more fat and extra energy. If we consume more calories than our bodies can burn off, we get bigger.

The amount of food we need to eat depends on our age, body size and how physically active we are. But often, if we are given a huge plate of food, we'll eat it all, even if we don't need it. It's a good idea to try and eat smaller portions of food, and listen to your body; if you feel full, stop eating.

Here are a few other useful tips for controlling portion sizes:

- Use smaller plates and bowls when dishing up your meals.

- Try to eat slowly. Most of us eat far too quickly and don't chew our food properly before swallowing. If you are still hungry after finishing a meal, wait for 10 minutes before dishing up a second portion. This should give your body time to feel full and chances are you won't want that second portion after all.

- If you are given the choice between a regular-sized portion and a larger one, opt for the regular portion. Chances are that will still be more food than you need.
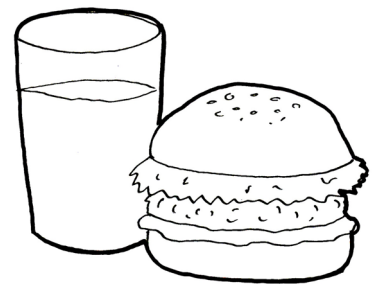
For more information on portion sizes, check out:

www.bupa.co.uk/health_information/html/healthy_living/lifestyle/diet/portion_size.html