Nifty Nutrients

Is it a Portion or a Serving?

A portion is the amount of food you choose to eat. There is no standard portion size and no single right or wrong portion size. A portion is what you serve yourself, what might come in one food package or what a restaurant might give you. You might also think of a portion as a helping.

A serving is a standard amount used to help give advice about how much to eat or to identify how many calories and nutrients are in a food. For example, a sandwich has two slices of bread. According to MyPlate, the serving size for bread is one slice. The portion in your sandwich is two slices, which equals two servings.

A common problem today is that when we look at a standard serving of a food or beverage, it looks very small in comparison to the portion of foods we see in restaurants or in food packages. It's not a problem with your eyes! We call this portion distortion—the portions are way too big. You have to look at the Nutrition Facts Label on food packages to see how many servings are in a package.

Here are some easy tips for how you can tell what a healthy portion is (teachers may want to show students these objects).

- A serving of nuts is a small handful.
- For meat, a deck of cards serves as a good eyeball guess.
- For cheese, four dice equals one serving.
- For fruits and vegetables, a computer mouse or a tennis ball is about the size of a half -cup of vegetables.
- For milk, a serving is equal to a school-size carton or a carton of yogurt.

Please see the other side of this sheet for more examples of serving sizes.

Source: North Carolina Department of Education, NET Program
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Eat Smart Be Smart

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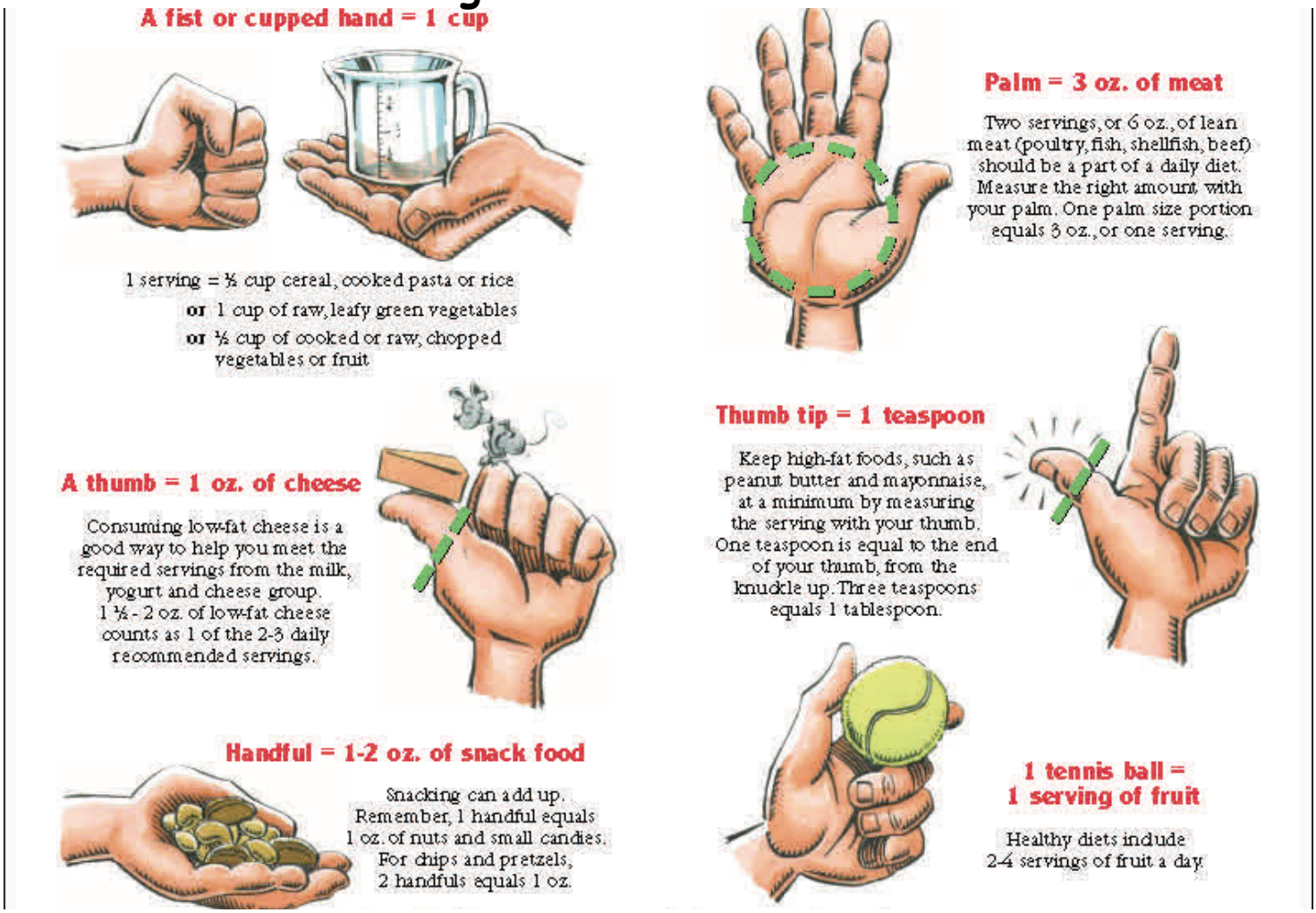
Serving Sizes are in Your Hand



What's in a Serving Size?

Grains Group	1/2 cup cooked pasta or rice 1 slice of bread 1 cup of cereal	A rounded handful An audiocassette tape A tennis ball
Vegetable Group	1 cup green salad 1 baked potato 1/2 cup vegetable (like broccoli, 6 asparagus spears, 6 baby carrots)	A tennis ball A tennis ball A light bulb
Fruit Group	1/2 cup grapes (16 grapes) 1/2 cup of fresh fruit 1 medium-size fruit 1/4 cup dried fruit (like raisins)	A light bulb 7 cotton balls A tennis ball A large egg or golf ball
Dairy Group	1 ounce cheese 1 cup ice cream 1 cup milk or yogurt	A pair of dice A tennis ball School-size carton of milk or yogurt
Meat and Beans Group	2 Tablespoons peanut butter 3 ounces cooked meat, poultry or fish 1 cup dried beans 1 ounce nuts	A ping-pong ball A deck of cards A tennis ball One small handful
Fats, Oils and Sweets	1 teaspoon butter or margarine 2 Tablespoons salad dressing 1/2 cup chips, crackers or popcorn	A postage stamp as thick as your finger A ping-pong ball One handful