

# What is a portion?



## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To understand what to eat and reflect on own eating pattern
- To understand what is meant by a 'portion'
- To explore food and nutrition in terms of 'portions'

## RESOURCES

- Picture of a plate with a healthy main meal (Engage activity)
- Copies of Resources 1, 2, 3 and 4
- Range of foods that can be weighed or measured into portions (Activity 1)

- Weighing scales (digital and/or balance scales), paper plates, range of spoons for measuring (Activity 1)

## RELATED TOPICS

Food groups (Theme 1, Topic 1)

Nutritional information (Theme 1, Topic 3)

## HEALTH SKILLS

Eating the right amount of each food type is important in maintaining a balance over time. Food portion sizes are important so that people are not eating too much (or too little) and are getting the recommended amount of food. This focus encourages learners to think of nutrition in terms of portion sizes and to recognise and monitor the nutritional content of their daily or weekly food in order to maintain good health.

People have different food requirements so it is not realistic to be precise about portion size. It may be helpful for learners to establish a sense of portion size by comparing food portions to everyday objects (e.g. a matchbox) or by using spoons or cups. Some learners may want to be more precise about measuring correct portions for their own needs, but it is still important to stress that a reasonable amount for one person could be wholly inappropriate for another.

## FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

In order to understand portion sizes and apply them to daily eating, learners need to:

- be able to identify food items and food groups
- understand the concepts of portion sizes and proportion
- understand and compare size and weight using non-standard and standard measures.

## Functional Skills/Core Curriculum

Activities in this topic will contribute to learning in the following curriculum areas:

- classify foods into food groups  
**Maths** E2.24 (NHD1/E2.3)
- understand what is meant by a portion  
**Maths** E2.22 (NHD1/E2.4)
- represent information in tables or diagrams  
**Maths** E2.25 (NHD1/E2.5)
- add and subtract using whole numbers  
**Maths** E2.5 (NN1/E2.4)
- estimate, measure and compare portion sizes using grams and other measures  
**Maths** E3.15 (NMSS1/E2.6).

- Show learners a picture of any healthy main meal, e.g. a plate with meat, potatoes and two or three vegetables or a vegetarian equivalent. Discuss whether learners think this is a healthy meal and ask them to explain their decisions. Refer to the food plate on Resource 1 to confirm their answers or to discuss the range of food you need to eat.
- Discuss the idea that foods are not necessarily 'healthy' or 'unhealthy'; sometimes it is the amount that we eat and the proportions in which we eat the foods that determine whether our eating is healthy or unhealthy.
- Look again at Resource 1. Point out that the model shows five different food types that constitute a healthy diet when eaten in the proportions shown. Check learners' understanding of the relative proportions shown on the model and the phrases 'no more than', 'about' and 'at least'. Learners who are familiar with fractions may be able to describe the proportions in these terms; for example, carbohydrates make up about a third of our food intake. Use direct questions based on the graphical information to make sure that learners understand the model, for example: 'What should you eat most of?', 'How many **portions** of fruit and vegetables does the model recommend?', 'How many **portions** of dairy foods?'
- Draw attention to how the concept of 'portions' is used to provide an estimate of the amount you need from each food group. (The '5 a day' campaign to increase the amount of fruit and vegetables we eat has been widely publicised, so learners may already be familiar with the concept of what constitutes a 'portion' for items in this food group.)
- Point out that the emphasis is on **estimated amounts**. The aim is to provide a workable model that is easy to remember and follow.

What do you think makes up a healthy main meal?

Is it OK to eat as much as you like as long as you eat a good range of healthy foods?

What do we mean by a portion?

## ACTIVITY 1

### Understand portion sizes through practical experience

- Look at Resource 2 with the group and show how it corresponds to Resource 1. Discuss the concept of portion size with the group. Show real examples and ask learners what they consider portion sizes of different foods to be. Learners may want to compare helpings they have had from takeaway outlets.
- Point out that appropriate portion sizes vary from person to person. An active young male will need more to eat than an elderly person who is unable to get out of the house. Ask for other examples to demonstrate different needs in terms of sex, age and activity levels.
- Emphasise the importance of having a rough idea of what a portion is for yourself and your family. Stress that you do not have to weigh items accurately (although you can if you want/need to) but can use estimation and the 'look' of a portion to work out portion sizes.
- Introduce practical activities to help learners get an idea of the concept of portion size. Make sure there are a range of spoon sizes available and that learners can identify a tablespoon and a teaspoon. For example:
  - Provide cooked rice and pasta so that learners can see what two or three tablespoons looks like on a plate.
  - Have vegetables so that learners may add these to the plates. Encourage discussion about quantities throughout the activity.

Will the size of a portion be the same for everyone?

What can we use to work out a portion size?

- If possible weigh 450 g of mince (or use dried food as a substitute) and label it 'Mince'. Ask learners to find out how many 75 g portions this amount will provide. (If you have balance scales, prepare individual 75 g amounts so learners can count out how many 75 g portions make 450 g.) Show other variations of portions of protein and ask learners if they agree that a pack of playing cards (Resource 2) is a useful way to describe this portion.
  - Provide raw carrots so that learners can find out how many peeled and diced carrots make one portion and how many carrots are needed to provide one portion each for four people.
  - Provide frozen peas so learners can find the weight of two tablespoons and then work out how much is needed to provide one portion each for four people.
- Note: it is preferable to use real food items where possible and where there are the correct washing facilities available for learners. Where this is not possible, dry products may be used and labelled as a substitute.
  - Stress again that the portion sizes are a guide only and that people's individual needs vary. Give the example of a man doing physical work all day and an elderly person who is housebound. Discuss with learners the fact that the overall range of food and the proportions will stay much the same, but the quantity (or portion sizes) will vary.
  - Fats and sugars have not been included as these are foods that are found within other foods. This may provide a useful focus for other discussion.
  - At the end of this activity, recap on each food type and ask learners to describe their favoured method for estimating portion sizes. Learners may want to compare portions to handfuls, to other everyday objects, or may be happier to use weighing or measuring tools. All methods are acceptable.

### Support

- Check learners' understanding of spoon sizes.
- If learners are using balance scales, help them to work out the value of both labelled and unlabelled divisions.
- If learners are using digital scales, make sure they understand decimal notation and place value (e.g. 1 kg = 1000 g, 0.1 kg = 100 g, 0.01 kg = 10 g, 0.001 kg = 1 g).
- Where learners have difficulty weighing, work on establishing a visual memory of portion size using comparison with everyday objects.

### ESOL

- Check that learners are familiar with everyday ways of describing quantities, e.g. '**small/medium/large** (potato)', 'three **heaped tablespoons of** (cooked pasta)', 'three **slices of** (meat)', 'four **tablespoons of** (cooked beans)', 'a **matchbox-sized piece of** (cheese)', 'a **glass/cup of** (milk)'. Where possible provide pictures and/or real examples for learners to label with appropriate phrases.
- Make sure that the food mentioned in discussion represents a wide range of individual and cultural preferences. Invite individuals to contribute by suggesting food items suitable for each food group.

### TIP

Remind learners that measurements such as handfuls and cupfuls can vary but grams and ounces are consistent.

*Can you name some foods that contain a lot of fat/sugar?*

*Which method do you prefer for estimating portion sizes?*

## ACTIVITY 2

### Further practice in thinking about what constitutes a 'portion'

Using Resource 2, ask learners to complete the 'Is this a portion?' quiz on Resource 3. This may be set up as a reading and writing activity, or with a 'quizmaster' asking the questions. It may be done individually, in pairs or in small teams. Go through the answers together at the end.

#### Support

- If the quiz is done as a reading and writing task, encourage learners to underline key words or phrases such as 'dairy', and look for these on Resources 1 and 2 to help them answer the questions.
- If done as a spoken quiz, highlight/emphasise the key words or phrases.

#### ESOL

Before learners try the quiz, check if there are any unfamiliar words that may prevent them from completing it.

## ACTIVITY 3

### Reflect on current eating habits and complete a food diary

- Before learners try these activities, check that none of them are fasting.
- Introduce the 'Do your meals have the right balance?' activity on Resource 4. Explain the purpose of the chart and remind learners about the information on portions on Resources 1 and 2.
- Show a few examples of how to log meals suggested by learners. Ask learners to write down all the foods they ate the previous day and have eaten so far today. As there may not be an English name for some foods from other cultures, suggest they write the names in any language.
- Note: for learners with poor literacy skills, it may be more helpful to provide a chart with pictures of food which they can tick.
- Suggest that learners try to record their food for a week in order to see their true eating patterns. This will show them whether they need to make changes to their eating habits, however small. Stress that they will only make changes if they think there is a need and they feel ready to do it.

*Do your meals have the right balance?*

*Are you surprised about how much you eat of one particular type of food?*

#### Support

Help learners to categorise foods into the food groups and to record the food they ate on one day. Talk aloud as you do it so learners can hear your thinking process, for example: 'so you had cereal for breakfast, which is going to be at least one portion of carbohydrates and one portion of milk; let's put the right colours against those two items. What did you have to drink for breakfast?'

#### ESOL

- Check that learners understand the category descriptions (e.g. 'poultry', 'protein substitute', 'dairy', 'sweets').
- Use the chart as the basis for introducing and practising phrases for making rough estimates of quantities and proportions, e.g.:
  - 'How much cereal did you have for breakfast?'
  - 'A large bowl.'
  - 'So how many portions is that?'
  - 'At least/about/no more than two.'

## Action

- Ask learners to extend their food diary for a week (as suggested in Activity 3) and report back to the group. Remind them to pay particular attention to portion sizes during the week.
- Ask learners to suggest ways which may help them to eat more healthily. Encourage learners to make one positive and specific change to their diet, such as eating one extra piece of fruit per day.
- Evaluate real menus from restaurants, canteens, etc. and make suggestions on how to improve them in terms of meeting the guidelines outlined in the food plate on Resource 1.

*What can you change to make your diet more healthy?*

# What is a portion?

## RESOURCE 1

The Eatwell Guide shows the basis for healthy eating.

**Fruit and vegetables:**  
at least 5 portions a day

**Bread, cereal, rice,  
pasta and potatoes:**  
6 to 11 portions a day



**Meat, fish and  
alternatives: about  
2 portions** a day

**Fat and sweets:**  
Eat less often and in small amounts

**Milk and dairy:**  
about 3 portions  
a day

The **actual number** of portions depends on age, sex, body type and activity level.

OK, but what is  
a portion?

# What is a portion?

## RESOURCE 2

### Fruit and vegetables

(fibre, vitamins and minerals for healthy bodies)



1 medium pear, apple or orange = 1 portion  
3 large tablespoons of tinned fruit = 1 portion

1 small glass of fruit juice = 1 portion



2 large tablespoons of vegetables = 1 portion

1 small bowl of salad = 1 portion



### Bread, cereal, rice, pasta and potatoes

(carbohydrates for energy)



1 slice of bread = 1 portion

3 heaped tablespoons of cooked pasta or cereal = 1 portion

2 small potatoes = 1 portion

2 tablespoons of cooked rice = 1 portion



### Meat, fish, eggs, soya, beans, lentils, nuts, etc.

(protein and minerals, e.g. iron, for growth and health)



3 slices of meat, poultry or fish = 1 portion

About the size of a pack of playing cards = 1 portion

About 75 grams = 1 portion

1 egg = 1 portion



4 tablespoons of cooked beans = 1 portion

### Dairy

(calcium for bones and teeth, fats for energy)



1 glass of milk = 1 portion

1 small yogurt = 1 portion



1 matchbox-sized piece of cheese = 1 portion

# What is a portion?

RESOURCE 3

## Portions quiz

### Is this a portion?

Y/N

a		1 tablespoon of raspberry jam = <b>1 portion of fruit</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b		1 cup of tea with milk (but no sugar) = <b>1 portion of dairy</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c		1 glass of banana milk shake = <b>1 portion of dairy</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d		4 tablespoons of cooked beans = <b>1 portion of protein</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e		1 cup of coffee made with freshly ground coffee beans = <b>2 portions of protein</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f		1 small yogurt = <b>1 portion of dairy</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g		1 glass of grapefruit juice = <b>1 portion of fruit</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h		1 whole watermelon = <b>1 portion of fruit</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i		1 boiled egg = <b>1 portion of protein</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j		3 tablespoons of tinned pineapple = <b>1 portion of fruit</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k		2 tablespoons of mushy peas = <b>1 portion of vegetables</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
l		$\frac{1}{2}$ glass of red wine = <b>1 portion of fruit</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
m		<b>Vegetables</b> in a <b>takeaway meal</b> count towards your '5 a day' total	<input type="checkbox"/>
n		<b>Peanut butter</b> counts towards your intake of 'dairy'	<input type="checkbox"/>
o		1 packet of smoky bacon crisps = <b>1 portion of vegetables</b> and <b>1 portion of protein</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>



# What is a portion?

RESOURCE 4

## Do your meals have the right balance? Check it out with a food log.

Write down all the foods you eat each day. Colour one dot for every portion of the different food types.

TARGET	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
no more than 1	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
about 2	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○
about 3	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○
5 or more	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
6 to 11	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
<b>Breakfast</b>							
<b>Snack</b>							
<b>Midday meal</b>							
<b>Snack</b>							
<b>Evening meal</b>							

# What is a portion?

There are no audio scripts for this topic.

ANSWERS

## ACTIVITY 2 / Resource 3

- a N
- b N
- c Y
- d Y
- e N
- f Y
- g Y
- h N (several portions)
- i Y
- j Y
- k Y
- l N
- m Y
- n N
- o N