

Announcer: Welcome to Tram Talks, a little taste of Deakin University here in the world's first mobile lecture theatre. You've chosen to listen to podcast number 1, 'Portion Distortion', in which Associate Professor Tim Crowe talks about the influence food package size has on our lives. Enjoy.

Assoc. Prof. Crowe: What makes us eat? I mean, it's a very simple question. But have you ever really thought about why you eat? Certainly, there's our hunger. Our appetite, our desire for food, our own personal food taste preferences, what time of the day it is, and even our mental state are all things that affect what we eat, how much we eat, and when we eat. But there's one thing you may not be aware of that's a big driver in what affects how much food we eat. This is actually the serving size of food. Not only the serving size of food, but the container it comes in or even the type of cutlery that you use to serve food can all increase the chance you'll actually overeat.

Scientists call this term portion distortion. It can easily lead to passive overconsumption, and with that real increases in the risk of obesity and its connected diseases. Particularly, in this food environment we have an abundance of easily available energy dense food. So it's been a fascinating field of research that has advanced over the last few decades that has studied that how food is presented to a person and the serving size given to them can significantly affect how much of that food a person eats.

Now, researchers have combined all of the different research done in this field into a major scientific review with some very stark conclusions and some very practical recommendations for how you can control portion distortion. So involving over 72 research studies, the review looked at the influence of portion size, the size that food was packaged in, and even the tableware that was used to serve food on how much food a person ate. The results were very consistent which showed a greater likelihood for people to eat more food when the serving size, the packaging size, or the tableware was large compared to the smaller varieties of each.

Let's put some hard numbers to this. How much more food did people eat? Well, the researchers made an estimate that based upon the exposure to larger serving sizes, if somebody consciously made a decision to reduce their exposure to large serving sizes or large packaging sizes, they could probably cut how much energy they ate each day by about 12% to 16%. In the face of a growing overweight and obesity problem, these are not small numbers to be trifled at.

So what was really interesting from the research was that the susceptibility for a person to eat more with larger food sizes applied equally to men and women

regardless of their body weight. Whether someone was overweight or underweight or a healthy weight, or whether they were hungry or had a tendency to control their own eating behaviour, everybody was as still susceptible to the concept of portion distortion. This means that the subconscious cues to eat more apply to everybody.

Larger serving sizes and bigger packaging sizes really do appeal to our sense of value. That's wonderful if you're out shopping for washing powder. But, in an environment that is a strong driver to promote weight gain, such value for money seeking behaviour when it comes to food is to most people's detriment.

The big question: how do you fight back against portion distortion? Well, there are a couple of things you can do to fight back against our subconscious cues to over consume. The first one is to make a conscious choice to self-serve smaller portions of kilojoule dense foods such as desserts, drinks, and fatty foods. If you serve yourself a smaller portion size particularly in a container that's of a small size, you will feel just as full, just as satisfied but you will likely eat less food. Also, consider using smaller plates and cups and even serving utensils at home and even at restaurants.

When shopping, be wary of the two for one or 30% more label promotions on food. These really do appeal to our sense of value, but the problem is that we'll actually eat more of these when we're sitting at home on the couch. So actually go for less value for money when you're shopping for food, particularly for confectionery and snacks. Now, none of these guarantees that you will eat less food, but it's one small step you can take in a food environment of abundance to help you eat a bit less food, eat better quality food, and perhaps control your weight.

Announcer: Thanks to Associate Professor Tim Crowe. This has been another Tram Talk from the world's first mobile lecture theatre. Just a small sample of what's available at Deakin University. Visit study.deakin.edu.au to learn more.