When Is A Bargain Not A Bargain?

The title above came to me as I was thinking about the large food portions served in so many restaurants these days. Everyone likes a bargain. Recognizing the American fondness for economizing, savvy restaurant owners have doubled portions on some items. Since food is a low-cost item for restaurants, they can afford to load up your platter for just a few pennies more. As Americans, we have been taught to clean our plates. So even though we don't really need larger servings, we still seem to find room. Add to this the American tendency to be sedentary yet consume much more food than needed to maintain a healthful physique, and we are a society with some weighty problems.

I have a friend who goes to a restaurant with a strategy in mind: She plans to eat half of the food and take half home. Knowing that our brains don't get the message that we are full until we are over-full, she eats slowly so that she knows when to stop. Here are some other strategies to keep in mind when eating out, especially at fast food restaurants:

- Resist the temptation to "supersize" a portion unless it's salad.
- Choose low fat dressings or use dressings sparingly when you order a salad.
- Eat slowly, pausing between bites to savor the flavors.
- Opt for grilled foods over fried when possible.
- Ask for nutrition information on menu items before ordering.
- Resist the urge to join the "Clean Plate Club" just because it's there.
- Share food with a friend or take a portion home for another meal.
- Keep food safety in mind! If you are not going right home to put the leftover food in the refrigerator, don't take it with you.

What people perceive to be a serving size of a pre-packaged food and what actually is a serving may surprise you. For example ½ cup is a serving of ice cream, but few people eat just a ½ cup. And most
bagels amount to two or three servings of bread! Another mental food trap is the trend toward larger dishes and glassware—so much so that if we fill to capacity a bowl, mug, glass or plate, we get much more than one serving. A way to visualize serving sizes listed on nutrition labels is to measure the amount. For example, fruit or vegetable juices come in a variety of sizes, but ¾ cup (6 ounces) of juice is considered a serving size. Measure out ¾ cup of water or juice, pour it into a glass, and make a mental note of how much the amount really is.

For additional information on the best choices to select at various fast food restaurants, check them out on the Web at www.nutritiondata.com. Click on a fast food restaurant and enter one of the kinds of food you typically order. You can get a Nutrition Facts label for each food you choose.

Save your bargain hunting for the antique mall, the yard sale or the clothing store. When it comes to deciding between larger food portions or good health, remember—the real wealth is your continued health!

Please contact me for a list of nutritious choices at several major fast food restaurants. I would also be happy to answer any questions you have about a particular fast food.

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