

Keep an eye on portion size.

One perennial source of parental stress is the struggle over just how much food our kids should be eating, whether you're trying to get a selective eater to take a bite of anything green or rein in a kid with a sweet tooth who wants seconds of dessert. With either extreme, knowing the size of a healthy portion can give some needed perspective. The USDA offers a customized set of portion guidelines on the Web (see "The Right Amount to Eat," page 64).

Explain portions with objects.

Many packaged or prepared foods that a kid would eat as a single serving are actually multiple portions, but you'd only discover that by carefully reading the nutrition label. To help kids make sense of these often confusing measurements, nutritionists suggest using some portion-size stand-ins that they can more easily relate to. Connie Evers, for example, likes to use a deck of cards to show her son the size of a healthy portion of meat. (For other serving-size visual aids, see the meal examples at right.) And here's a tip from Jill Foster: if the proper portion looks small on your dinner plate, serve it on something smaller, such as a salad plate. "It makes the plate look filled," she explains.

Set a healthy example. Finally, keep in mind that eating meals together isn't just a great way to catch up on your family's day and share one another's company. Nutritionists note that the family dinner table is also where we can model the healthy eating habits we want our kids to learn. That's food for thought indeed.

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SEE FOR YOURSELF

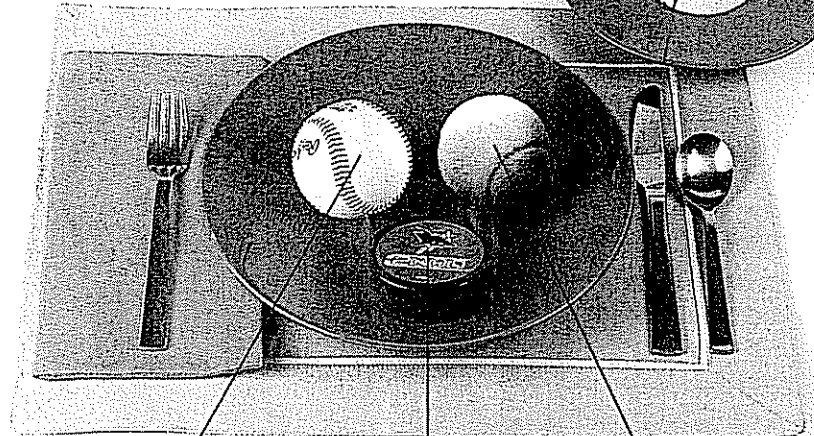
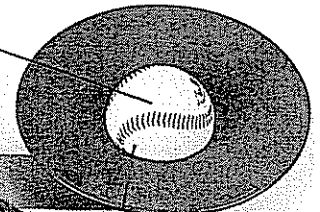
A Sporting Way to Explain Serving Size

Visual cues offer an effective way to show kids how much food they should be eating at meals. The dinner below, adapted from *The Portion Teller* by Lisa R. Young (Morgan Road Books, 2005), depicts portions for eight-year-olds who exercise less than 30 minutes a day.

Milk
8 ounces
50% of daily dairy needs



Ice cream
½ cup
100% of daily treats allowance

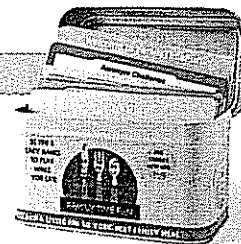


Cooked brown rice
1 cup
40% of daily grain needs

Hamburger
3 ounces
75% of daily protein needs

Broccoli
1 cup
67% of daily vegetable needs

Mealtime Games That Keep Kids at the Table



Dinner Games and Activities is a box of 51 challenges designed to get kids to eat their dinner and have fun at the table (FamilyTimeFun, ftgames.com, \$16). The fun includes:

Kyle's Lucky Vegetables Players roll a die, then must eat that number of bites of a vegetable. The winner is the first person to finish his vegetables.

Goober Goat One person starts with a farm-related word, then each player comes up with a new word linked to the last. *Corn*, for example, might be followed by *bread*, *oven*, and *refrigerator*. See how far from the farm you get.

Counting Moo Participants count off around a table, replacing even numbers with the word *moo*. If you mess up, you have to drink your milk.