

VISIONS

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Value Marketing: As Portions Grow So Do American Waistlines

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What is the newest advertisement at local fast food restaurants and by food retailers? It is the “Big Meal” or the “Big Deal” and gives you twice the food for the money. Value marketing is helping to bulk-up the portions we eat by adding extra food, calories, fat, and sugar to our daily intake.

“Value marketing” is a way for restaurants and food retailers to offer consumers a lot more food for just a little more money. The cost of food is low in the U.S., so manufacturers can sell larger quantities for only pennies more. Economically, it looks like a bargain. But, when it comes to its impact on health, super-sized portions are not a bargain. The problem in value-marketing is the extra food and calories that Americans are consuming.

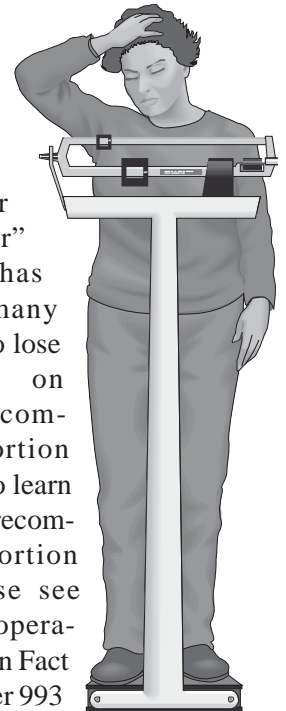
According to a survey conducted by the American Institute of Cancer Research (AICR), bigger portions may mean more people are overweight or obese due to consuming these very large “value meals.” The survey found that 26% of Americans base the amount of food they eat on the

amount they are served. Those who are overweight seem to finish their plates more often than those who say they are at their ideal weight. According to USDA surveys, American adult caloric intake has risen from 1,854 to 2,002 calories per day over the past twenty years. That is a 148 calorie per day increase which equals a weight gain of about 15 pounds per year.

According to the National Institutes of Health, 55% of adults are clinically overweight and 1 in 4 is severely overweight or obese. New data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that our national weight has increased over 6% between 1998 and 1999. For the first time in American history, over half of our population is at increased risk for diseases such as high blood pressure, certain cancers, coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, gallbladder disease, and osteoarthritis. More food for less money is not healthy.

The food and restaurant industry say they sell value meals because they are responding to consumer demand, not creating it. In fact, consumers rate the amount of food they get in a restaurant or in a package of food as “good” only if it is a large serving.

Unfortunately, this “bigger means better” attitude has caused many Americans to lose perspective on what a recommended portion looks like. To learn more about recommended portion sizes, please see Rutgers Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet Number 993



(continued on page 7.)

HIGHLIGHTS

Strengthen communication and relationships with / Messages	2
Food Allergies	3
Finger Foods and More: Tips & Techniques to Help Babies Feed Themselves	4
Omega - 3s: The Good Fats	5
Credit Reports: Your First Line of Defense Against Identity Theft	6

Strengthen Communication and Relationships with *I Messages*

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“You’re wrong.” “You always leave the room a mess.” “You’re driving me crazy.” “You’re late.” Sound familiar? Most of us tell others about their behavior starting with the word “you.” What happens when someone says, “you did this” or “you did that?” Most of us get defensive or stop listening. There is another way.

When you care about your relationship with another person, such as a co-worker, child, spouse, or friend, you may wish to share how the problem behavior affects you. *I Messages* tell others how their behavior makes you feel. It puts the responsibility to change in their hands.

Here’s an example: “I feel aggravated when the room is not cleaned up because it means I need to spend extra time cleaning before my meeting.” I’m feeling *aggravated*. The reason for my aggravation is that the room has not been cleaned. If the listener cares about our relationship or the effect the behavior has on me, then she or he will offer to fix the situation.

I Messages don’t come naturally. They take practice and a special vocabulary that identifies feelings. There are two reasons why *I Messages* may be difficult. First, many of us have hard time putting our feelings into words. The list of feelings in this article can help expand your vocabulary. Second, in the beginning, the formula for *I Messages* may require a lot of practice.

Here’s how to use *I Messages*:

Tell how you feel when the behavior occurs.



“I worry that something has happened to you . . .”

Describe the behavior that’s causing the problem.

“when you don’t call or come home on time, . . .”

Explain how the behavior affects you.

“because I don’t know where you are and I’m afraid something has happened to you.”

Either of these two formulas will work:

“I feel ___when ___ because ___.” Or “When ____, I feel ___because ___.”

Examples:

- I feel great and energized when I’m asked for my opinion because it means my ideas are valued.
- I feel frustrated when coats and gloves are left all over the house, because I work hard to keep our home looking nice. I’m also afraid clothing will get lost.
- I’m thrilled when the dishes are washed and put away without reminders because I don’t like to nag.
- “When my questions about Mom’s health are not answered, I feel concerned because I will not know how to get her the right treatment.”

The next time you have a situation

where you value the relationship and you would like to change the problem behavior, try an *I Message*. Practice the formula until you feel comfortable speaking in this manner. The results will be worth the effort!

Words to Increase Your Feelings Vocabulary

Happy	Angry
Loved	Sad
Concerned	Confident
Frustrated	Thrilled
Scared	Surprised
Annoyed	Excited
Disappointed	Encouraged
Nervous	Anxious
Calm	Impatient
Bored	Humiliated
Hopeful	Confused
Valued	Honored

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Food Allergies

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What does it mean to be allergic to a food?

People often use the term “food allergy” to describe any unpleasant physical reaction after consuming a food or beverage. A true food allergy occurs only when the immune system mistakes certain food particles (usually proteins) for harmful compounds. This mistake causes the body to release the chemical histamine. Histamine causes the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction.

What are the signs and symptoms of a food allergy?

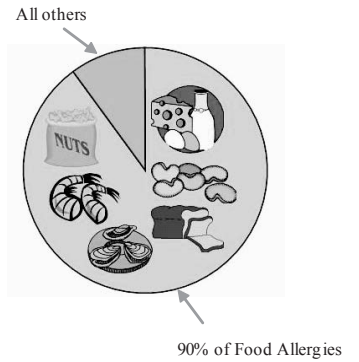
Allergic reactions signs and symptoms range from merely uncomfortable and annoying all the way to life threatening. The signs of an allergic reaction can involve the skin, lungs, or intestines. Symptoms can include nausea, vomiting, gas, diarrhea, swelling of the face and/or tongue, hives, rash, runny or congested nose, and choking or closing of the throat that makes it hard to breathe. In the most extreme cases, death can occur from anaphylactic shock.

Anaphylactic shock is rare, but it is the most severe and dangerous form of an allergic reaction. It can be life threatening if not treated *immediately*. The first symptom often is an itchy or swelling tongue, wheezing, and tightening of the throat. This may be followed by chest pain, dizziness, weakness, irregular heartbeat, and fainting. Symptoms can show up within 5 to 15 minutes. They may be mild at first, but will usually get worse very quickly. A person with these symptoms must be taken to an emergency room as soon as possible—otherwise they are likely to die. The reaction can develop over several hours and severe symptoms can reappear up to an hour later

How many people have a food allergy?

Many people believe they have a food allergy, but the medical community estimates that only 2% adults have a true food allergy. If a person suspects that he or she is allergic to several foods, it is very important that this be verified by medical tests. Avoiding many foods may cause a person to shortchange their health. Keep in mind that most people with true food allergies are allergic to 3 or fewer foods (Food Allergies: Rare But Risky, 1994).

Food Allergies



Which foods usually cause allergies?

Although allergic reactions can be caused by almost any food, 8 foods cause 90% of them. These foods are: milk, egg, wheat, peanuts, soy, tree nuts, fish, and shellfish (Allergy Facts & Fiction, 1999). The most common culprits for adults are fish, shellfish, peanuts, and tree nuts. Cow’s milk, egg, wheat, peanuts, tree nuts, and soy most frequently bother children (Food Allergies: Rare But Risky, 1994). Peanuts are particularly problematic. About a third of emergency room patients treated for anaphylactic shock are due to peanut allergies. Peanut allergies cause 100 to 125 deaths every year—that is more people than die from reactions to insect stings (Helmuth, 1999; Facts & Fiction, 1999).

How much food will cause an allergic reaction?

Sensitivity to allergy causing compounds varies from person to person. In very sensitive people, as little as 1/5000th of teaspoon could cause anaphylactic shock and death (Food Allergies: Rare But Risky, 1994). Severe reactions can be caused by just inhaling cooking vapors, opening a package, or even kissing someone who had recently eaten the problem food. Please remember though, that hypersensitivity is the exception, not the rule. Fortunately, most people are not dangerously hypersensitive.

How is a food allergy treated?

Today, the only way to prevent an allergic reaction is to avoid the problem food. So, it is important to read food labels very carefully. When eating at a restaurant, individuals should ask questions to verify that the item ordered is free of problem foods. Those with allergies may need to research possible substitute ingredients and learn other names used for common foods.

Can a food allergy be inherited?

There’s definitely a genetic link when it comes to food allergies. A child has about a 10% risk of developing an allergy if neither parent has one. If one parent has an allergy, a child has a 20 to 50% chance of having it, too. If both parents have an allergy, the child’s chances of having it vary from 40% to 100%.

(continued on page 7.)

Finger Foods and More: Tips & Techniques to Help Babies Feed Themselves

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When babies are ready to feed themselves, many parents may struggle with finding the “perfect foods” — foods that are nutritious, tasty, and age-appropriate. They may wonder which ones to avoid, as well. Exposing little ones to healthful, nutritious foods at a young age is the best way to encourage them to eat healthier throughout their lives.

By age one, babies usually are ready to feed themselves. Curved “toddler spoons” are great teaching tools, especially for foods like yogurt. Although children should get plenty of practice using utensils, it is equally important for them to experiment with finger foods, as well. Finger foods are a great opportunity for little ones to show their independence by feeding themselves. (They also are easy to prepare.)

As a babies make the transition to table food, they will want to learn as much as possible about the tastes and textures offered. Experts advise letting children play and experiment as they learn how to handle new foods. The more familiar children are with a food, the more likely they will be to try it. They may even be less finicky!

Adults caring for babies should expect messes and a few spills during this transition time. But, they should be patient and let children use their hands to eat, despite the mashed food that ends up on the walls or in the carpet. (Hint: To make cleanup easier,

caregivers can place a plastic trash bag or tablecloth under the highchair, and use larger bibs that cover most of the child’s clothes.) The best advice for adults is to relax and enjoy...this is a learning time for both of babies and adults. Children will have fun using their fingers and making a mess, and adults may find themselves having fun watching!



Adults always need to remember that safety is most important when it comes to selecting foods for children. Young children under age 4 are at risk for choking because their throats are small and they may not chew food well. Having teeth does not mean that a child can handle all foods. These foods present a choking hazard: hot dogs, whole bananas, raw vegetables, whole grapes, popcorn, chips, nuts, seeds, raisins, dates, string cheese, round cereals, marshmallows, round candies, and peanut butter—especially if it is spread on thickly or eaten from a spoon.

To reduce the possibility of choking, parents can follow these important tips:

- Cut hot dogs, grapes, and whole bananas lengthwise into four pieces.

- Pull string cheese into narrow strands of cheese and cut into short pieces.
- Spread peanut butter thinly and avoid serving on a spoon.
- Cut children’s food into small pieces.
- Make children sit when eating.

Healthy eating habits are established early in life, so parents of young children have an important job ahead of them. Finding a variety of nutritious finger foods for little ones can be a challenge—but it is not impossible.

Great Finger Food Ideas

Grains, Breads, Cereals and Pasta:

Tip: Always serve children small pieces. Cut or slice larger pieces into bite-size pieces to prevent choking.

- Dry cereal, such as Cheerios® or Kix®
- Graham crackers
- Oven-dried, Zwieback toast
- Cereal bars, such as NutriGrain®
- Crackers
- Pancakes and waffles
- Tortellini or mini ravioli
- Elbow macaroni, “bow tie,” or other small pasta
- Tortillas
- Mini rice cakes
- Cooked rice
- Pita bread (add humus for a tasty, nutritious dip)

Fruits

Tip: Follow the safety ideas from this article to prevent choking. Serve ripe, soft, peeled, fruit and always slice before serving.

- Bananas
- Grapes
- Cantaloupe
- Honeydew
- Peaches
- Guava

(continued on page 7.)

Omega-3s: The Good Fats

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Omega-3 fatty acids are a type of polyunsaturated fat. They are called essential fatty acids (EFAs) because humans can't make them so it is "essential" to get them from foods. These fats perform many important functions. For example, omega-3s are used to make cell walls. They also promote good vision and keep the heart beating at a constant rate. These fats help the brain to develop and function normally, too. No other fatty acids have so many important effects!

Two types of omega-3s, eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexanoic acid (DHA), are found in oily cold-water fish such as tuna, salmon, and mackerel. Foods of plant origin rarely contain EPA or DHA. But, they do contain another omega-3 called alpha-linolenic acid (ALA). ALA is found in dark green leafy vegetables, flaxseed oil, and some other vegetable oils. Your body can make EPA from ALA. It is not important to memorize the types of omega-3s, just remember that if you see or hear EPA, DHA, or ALA, they are all omega-3s.

What are the Benefits of Eating Omega-3s?

Omega-3s are very important to your health, so eating foods rich in these fats will provide many benefits.

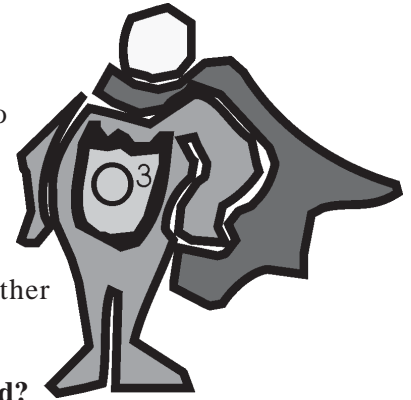
Improved Heart Health. Omega-3s help keep cholesterol levels low and reduce blood pressure. Thus, omega-3s help to lower the risk of heart disease.

Improved Symptoms of Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA). EPA and DHA are made into substances that help decrease inflammation and pain. So, diets high in omega-3s may reduce joint stiffness, swelling, and tenderness caused by RA.

Reduced Symptoms of Depression. The brain is 60% fat and needs omega-3s to function normally. Too little omega-3s in the body may cause mood disorders. This is because without these fatty acids, the brain cannot receive signals to regulate moods.

Cancer Prevention. Omega-3s may help prevent certain cancers, such as colon, breast, prostate, and lung cancers. They achieve this by blocking the formation of tu-

mors. Omega-3s also have been shown to slow the growth of existing tumors which helps prevent cancer from spreading to other parts of the body.



How Much do I Need?

Currently, there is no recommended intake for omega-3s. But it is a good idea to include foods rich in omega-3s twice a week. Some rich food sources are:

- Atlantic salmon and other fatty, cold-water fish including herring, sardines, Atlantic halibut, bluefish, tuna, and Atlantic mackerel.
- Canola oil, flaxseed, flaxseed oil, walnuts, and leafy green vegetables.
- Venison and buffalo.
- Food fortified with omega-3s such as eggs and bread products.

What About Supplements?

If you are eating at least two portions of foods high in omega-3s each week, you should be getting enough. But if you are not eating these foods, fish oil supplements may be a good option. Capsules containing DHA and EPA are available and research has shown that there is no difference in the effects of eating oil-rich fish twice a week or taking fish oil capsules. The National Institute of Health recommends that if you choose to take a fish oil supplement, look for one with 650 mg of EPA and 650 mg of DHA. If you are on blood-thinners, such as warfarin or heparin check with your doctor before taking omega-3 supplements.

Where Can I Learn More?

The Omega-3 Information Network is a good place to start. It provides information on the health benefits of omega-3s, gives guidance on dietary intake, and identifies foods and supplements rich in omega-3s. Check out their website for more information: www.omega-3info.com

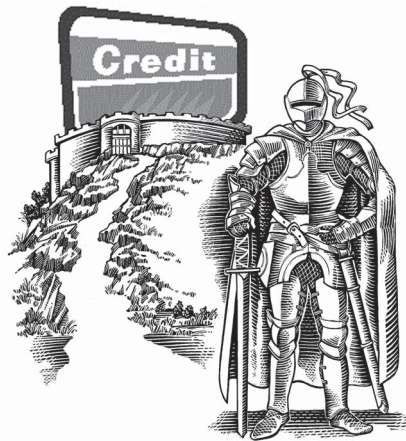
Credit Reports: Your First Line of Defense Against Identity Theft

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Sussex County, Interim Specialist in
Financial Resource Management

Identity theft is the stealing of a victim's personal information to commit a crime such as making fraudulent charges on a credit card. It is the nation's fastest growing financial crime and it can happen to anyone. An estimated 27.3 million Americans have been victims of identity theft in the last 5 years, according to the Federal Trade Commission. Someone's identity is stolen every 75 seconds.

Identity thieves use a variety of methods to gain access to a victim's personal information. They include: rummaging through trash, stealing wallets and purses containing identification, stealing mail, and stealing personal information from a victim's home. Identity theft is typically not a stand-alone crime but, rather, part of a larger criminal act, such as credit card fraud or cellular phone service fraud. In other words, it is usually the means to a fraudulent end.

Identity theft often goes undetected for months, allowing fraudsters the luxury of time to commit their crimes. It takes 14 months, on average, between the time that information is stolen and when a victim discovers the theft. One reason is that fraudsters often use change of address forms or fraudulent addresses to divert a victim's mail (e.g., credit card bills) to another location. A 2003 Federal Trade Commission survey found that 52% of all identity theft victims discovered the crime by monitoring their accounts. Another 26% were alerted to suspicious account activity by companies where they do business with. Eight percent reported that they



learned they were victims by being turned down for credit.

In 2003, Rutgers Cooperative Extension introduced an online Identity Theft Risk Assessment Quiz, which is available at www.rce.rutgers.edu/money/identitytheft/default.asp. An initial analysis of responses to this quiz revealed that consumers often do not check their credit report for evidence of identity theft. For some reason, perhaps cost or the time or know-how that it takes to make a credit file request, many people are not taking advantage of a valuable resource for limiting the amount of damage that an identity thief can cause. This is very dangerous. Regular credit report checks can alert victims to the fact that their identity has been stolen more quickly than if they don't check their reports. According to the Federal Trade Commission, the cost of an incident of identity theft is significantly reduced if the misuse of a victim's personal information is discovered quickly.

So how do consumers check for identity theft with their credit file? You have several options:

- Download a Credit File Request Form from the "Resources" section of the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Web site www.rce.rutgers.edu/money2000.

A free credit report is available each year to New Jersey residents, upon request, from each of the three major credit bureaus, Experian, Equifax, and TransUnion. Include all information requested, such as home addresses within the past five years. If you mail the form to request your credit file, include a photocopy of some type of identification containing your name and address (e.g., copy of a utility bill or driver's license).

- Another option is to call the credit bureaus to obtain your report. The contact numbers to request a credit report are 888-397-3742 for Experian; 800-685-1111 for Equifax; and 800-888-4213 for TransUnion.
- You can also request your credit file online. Both mailing and Web addresses for the three credit bureaus are included on the Credit File Request Form.

Once you have a copy of your credit file, view carefully and report errors and suspicious accounts promptly and in writing to the credit bureau that issued the report. Special forms are generally provided with credit reports to correct erroneous information. Follow the directions provided.

If you suspect that you are a victim of identity theft call the credit bureaus immediately on special phone numbers set up to receive reports about fraud. Request that a fraud alert be placed on your account to prevent an identity thief from opening additional accounts in your name. With a fraud alert, creditors and merchants are supposed to check with victims before granting additional credit by calling their home and discussing an impending loan or purchase to verify that it is authorized.

Value Marketing: As Portions Grow So Do American Waistlines

(continued from page 1.)

“Getting to Know Portion Sizes” which can be downloaded from the Rutgers Cooperative Extension website at: <http://www.rce.rutgers.edu/pubs/pdfs/fs993>

References:

American Institute for Cancer Research. New survey shows Ameri-

can ignore importance of portion size in managing weight. AICR home page. Available at <http://www.aicr.org/>

Accessed on June 27, 2003.

A free copy of AICR’s *New American Plate* brochure contains additional information about choosing healthy

portions along with recipe ideas that encourage plant-based foods at all meals. Call 1-800-843-8114 ext 30 Monday-Friday 9 am – 5 p.m. or order through their website at <http://www.aicr.org>.

Food Allergies

(continued from page 3.)

It is possible to keep children from developing food allergies?

Efforts to prevent or delay a food allergy must begin when the child is an infant. To prevent or delay allergies, mothers should consider breast feeding. Children who were breast fed have fewer allergies than those fed formula. Also, avoid feeding babies the foods mostly likely to cause allergies, such as cow’s milk, egg white, or peanuts, until they are at least a year old. In families with a history of allergies, it’s a good idea to avoid feeding these foods to children even longer. Women should also avoid eating these foods during the last 2 months of pregnancy and also while breast-feeding.

Do children outgrow food allergies?

Children have the best chance of outgrowing allergies to eggs, milk, or soy. But, they are unlikely to grow out of peanut, tree nut, fish, or shellfish allergies.

Where can I learn more about allergies?

The Food Allergy Network
10400 Eaton Place, Suite 107
Fairfax, VA 22030-2208
(703) 691-3179
(800) 929-4040
Fax: (703) 691-2713
E-mail: fan@worldweb.net
www.foodallergy.org

American Allergy Association
P.O. Box 640
Menlo Park, CA 94026
(415) 322-1663

References

Food Allergies: Rare but Risky, 1994. FDA Consumer, (<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms>) (May).

Food Allergy Questions and Answers, 1999. Available at: (<http://www.foodallergy.org/questions.html>).

Helmuth, L., 1999. Allergy vaccine may take fear out of nuts, Science News, Vol. 155, No. 14, (April 3).

Finger Foods and More: Tips & Techniques to Help Babies Feed Themselves

(continued from page 4.)

Pears • Plums • Mealy apple • Canned fruit chunks

Vegetables

Tip: Serve well-cooked vegetables to prevent choking. Fresh, frozen, and canned are all fine.

• Green beans • Broccoli • Asparagus • Sweet potatoes or yams • Car-

rots • Squash • Corn • Peas • Mashed potatoes

Dairy, Milk, Cheese, and Yogurt:

• Cottage cheese • Yogurt (look for whole milk yogurt for children under 2 years) • Cheese sticks (cut into strips) • Hard cheese (cut into pieces) • Fruit “smoothies” made with yogurt, milk, and fruit

Meat, Poultry, Beans and Eggs:

• Small pieces of tender meat, chicken, fish • Fish sticks • Scallops • Scrambled or hard-cooked eggs • Cooked dry beans • Baked beans

Dated Material

Putting Knowledge to Work.... Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Gloucester County gives reading a new twist with a fun program called *From Our Farms*. Children and their parents learn about food, nutrition and farms with children's storybooks and coordinating *From Our Farms* learning boxes, available from Gloucester County libraries. Parents and children checkout the boxes, read stories, and play games that teach about food, nutrition, and agriculture. For more information on *From Our Farms* in Gloucester County or to find out about bringing the *From Our Farms* program to your county, contact Luanne Hughes at hughes@aesop.rutgers.edu or Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, 1200 N. Delsea Drive, Clayton, NJ 08312.

A caregiver support training program, *Caring for You, Caring for Me*, is available for caregivers of the frail elderly and children through the Lawrence Township Senior Center, Cedarville and Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cumberland County. This support series addresses caregiver support needs, resources, and methods for navigating the home care and long-term care system. Contact Sharon Blase at blase@aesop.rutgers.edu or Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cumberland County, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, 291 Morton Avenue, Milville, NJ 08361.