



THE BRITISH DIETETIC ASSOCIATION

The Professional Association for Registered Dietitians

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Media Release

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For immediate release

How many peas in a portion?*

The five-a-day tag for target fruit and vegetable portions has become as familiar as 'twice a day' for tooth-brushing, but what are the right portion sizes for today's children?

According to new research, nine and ten year olds' perception of the average portion size varied considerably, with fruit portions being generally greater than vegetables. Satumas, for example, weighed in at around 120g compared to just over half that (60g) for peas. And a portion of apples selected by the children was just over 110g; a portion of carrots was about 70g.

Dietitians examined the food portion size judgements of over 90 Liverpool children. A selection of commonly eaten fruits and vegetables was cut into small pieces and put into large bowls, and the children were asked to place a portion into an empty bowl, which was then weighed.

Writing in the latest edition of *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, Dr Brian Johnson a dietitian from Abercromby Health Centre, Liverpool outlined the findings: "Although 'a portion' is a very convenient term to use when giving dietary advice, concepts of 'a portion' varied enormously and those with the largest perceptions of what a portion is may be discouraged from attempting to eat '5-a-day'. There is evidence of an increase in the number of children reporting eating fruit and vegetables over the last few years in Liverpool, but if the portion sizes are insignificant, little benefit is likely."

Dr Johnson, who works for Liverpool Primary Care Trust, added: "In all cases participants, on average, placed more fruit on the scales than vegetables; this may be because they enjoy eating fruit or because as most vegetables need to be prepared and cooked, many children may have little experience of handling or preparing vegetables. Additionally, the volume or density of the foods may have affected the weight selected, although investigation revealed only minor differences. Clearly the great variation observed supports the need for further nutrition education in schools, including fruit and vegetable tasting sessions during school time."

*An 80g portion of peas would be 240. A 61g average portion selected by the children, would be 183.

The findings confirm the confusion in the interpretation of portion sizes of fruits and vegetables. The five-a-day target is derived from total target intakes of 400g per day, and so portion sizes are suggested as approximately 80g. In practice, advice is usually based on handy measures, such as one serving for fruit such as apples/bananas, two portions for small fruit such as plums/kiwi, or three heaped tablespoons for vegetables such as cooked carrots, peas or sweetcorn.

For the clear experts in nutrition call the media hotline on 0870 850 2517 or pr@bda.uk.com or go to www.bda.uk.com and visit the press centre for the latest food fact sheets on a variety of topics. Food fact sheets on healthy eating for all ages and stages are available at <http://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/index.html>. Remember, you can trust a dietitian to know about nutrition.

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Media enquiries to The British Dietetic Association should be directed to our media hotline on 0870 580 2517 or pr@bda.uk.com. For interviews with Dr Johnson please contact, Abercromby Health Centre, Liverpool, tel: 0151 709-9370 or email: brian.johnson@southliverpoolpct.nhs.uk.

Notes to Editors

1. Reference: Mullarkey D, Johnson B, Hackett A. Portion size selection of fruits and vegetables by 9-to10-year old children in Liverpool. *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* 2007, volume 20, page 459-466. www.blackwellpublishing.com/jhn
2. The *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* is the official journal of the British Dietetic Association
3. The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with over 6,000 members. About two-thirds of members are employed in the National Health Service. The remaining members work in education, industry, research, sport settings or freelance.
4. Registered dietitians hold the only legally-recognised graduate qualifications in nutrition and dietetics. They are experts in interpreting and translating the science of nutrition into practical ways of promoting nutritional well-being, disease treatment and the prevention of nutrition-related problems. Their advice is sound and based on current scientific evidence.
5. Registration, awarded by the Health Professions Council, is an indication that a Dietitian is fit to practise and is working within an agreed statement of conduct. For further details about The British Dietetic Association, please visit our websites: www.bda.uk.com www.bdaweightwise.com www.teenweightwise.com.

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