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Food for Thought

## Surviving Our Supersized Society

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Losing weight or maintaining a healthy weight sounds simple, right? All you need to do is make a commitment to eat less and exercise more. Today's environment, however, can creep in as a barrier to success. Eating well is now quite challenging because of societal changes in the way we eat and live — especially if your goal is to manage your weight.

What are these changes that discourage us from staying healthy? The increase in size of what are considered standard portions of food, and the rapid development of technology that encourages us to stay glued to our computers and televisions instead of being physically active.

### Beyond Fast Food

When you think of today's growing portions, fast food probably comes to mind: Supersizing. Extra Value Meals. Great Biggie fries. Double Gulps. If these offerings were solely responsible for the growth of portion sizes, we might be able to bite the bullet, so to speak, and avoid them.

The problem is that portions are growing across the board, in grocery stores and cookbooks and on the family dinner table.

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Did you know that identical recipes for cookies and desserts in new editions of classic cookbooks such as "Joy of Cooking" now yield fewer servings? This means that individual portions are expected to be larger.

Here's a challenge: Try to find a fresh bagel the same size as a Lender's frozen bagel (2.3 ounces). It's next to impossible! A honey 9-grain bagel from Au Bon Pain is almost 5 ounces and 310 calories, the same number of calories as in a chocolate bar. And that's without anything on it!

At times, you're not even aware of the forces conspiring against you. But few more calories here and there plus the hours spent surfing the Internet translate to those extra 10 pounds that just won't come off.

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### **Whose Fault Is It?**

When we focus on why an *individual* is obese, a combination of genetic and environmental reasons comes to mind. However, if we ask why an *entire nation* is suddenly obese, we cannot ignore the environment as being the primary cause.

New research about the genetic bases of being overweight or obese is exciting. Novel treatments are surely on the horizon. Nevertheless, we must remember that genetic susceptibility, no matter how strong, will rarely create obesity without the temptations of a challenging food environment.

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### **Awareness Equals Success**

How much did you have to eat today? How much did you move your body? It sounds tedious, but honestly keeping track of your daily food intake and activity output is the only way to stay on top of your healthy weight goals. No longer can you fly blind, indulging without thought in today's hefty food offerings and entertaining technology. It is really up to you to be accountable.

Setting up an accounting system that works for you is essential. Seeing a written record of what you ate and how much you exercised will help you to find a balance specific to your needs and goals. Be sure to keep track throughout the day. If you save this for the end of the day, you risk missing some of the

small details, and it's usually the small details that count the most!

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## Changing The Environment

How easy it would be to eat smaller portions if they were simply smaller to begin with! So, why can't we just change the environment? It's not so easy, although some people are trying. Fast-food lawsuits are trying to mimic the tobacco lawsuits. Some obesity experts are recommending taxing certain junk foods. Despite well-intentioned political efforts, changing the polluted food environment will not be easy or quick.

Meanwhile, consider following Mom's advice to get off the sofa and go outside to get exercise. But think twice before following her advice to clean your plate.

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