

# French secrets to stay slim

## U.S. and French Portion Sizes Vary Vastly

### How can the French stay so slim, with all those luscious croissants, cheeses, pastries, and sauces?

A new study brings home what's known as "the French Paradox." Despite France's rich cuisine, the French are decidedly slimmer than Americans. Only 7% of French people are obese, compared with 30% of Americans.

A group of scientists set out to investigate this phenomenon -- comparing French and American foods, restaurants, cookbook recipes, even eating styles. The French secrets to staying slim provide lessons to Americans on losing weight.

### Sizing Things Up

Researchers weighed portions at 11 similar eateries in Paris and Philadelphia -- fast-food outlets, pizzerias, ice cream parlors, and ethnic restaurants.

**The average portion size in Paris was 25% smaller than in Philly.**

**Chinese restaurants in Philly served meals that were 72% bigger than Parisian Chinese restaurants.**

They looked at foods sold in supermarkets:

**A candy bar in Philadelphia was 41% larger than the same candy bar sold in Paris.**

**A soft drink was 52% larger, and a hot dog was 63% larger.**

**A carton of yogurt was 82% larger.**

Even American cookbook recipes -- from *The Joy of Cooking* -- produced larger portions than the French cookbook, *Je sais cuisiner*. Larger meat and soup portions, and smaller vegetable portions, were in the American cookbook than the French.

Also, Parisians spent 22 minutes on average dining at their McDonald's, compared with the 14 minutes that Philadelphians spent on their burgers, fries, and soft drinks.

"The results suggest ... that if served somewhat less than they would normally eat, people may be satisfied," reports lead researcher Paul Rozin, PhD, a psychologist with the University of Pennsylvania. His study appears in the September issue of the journal *Psychological Science*.

### Savor, Don't Stuff

Indeed, it's a cultural issue. Americans are getting exactly what they want -- value for their dollar, regardless of taste, says Sheah Rarback, RD, nutritionist and professor at the University of Miami School of Medicine.

They'll never lose weight that way.

The portions that are served in France -- people in this country wouldn't buy them," she tells WebMD. "People here wouldn't be satisfied."

It's time either to start cooking more at home, or at least eat smaller portions when dining out, Rarback says. "We need to get back to savoring the food we're eating, demanding foods that are flavorful. We need to enjoy the food and the company, instead of just wolfing the food down and barely even noticing the taste."

**One suggestion: Ask for a take-out box when your meal arrives. Put half the dinner away immediately, even before your fork hits the plate. You can lose weight, one meal at a time.**