



**FD** Food  
Drink  
Ireland

lbec

# Portion size

**Sector priorities  
for future success**



# Portion size

**There is a growing desire and need to improve health and wellbeing of populations across the world. Consumers are looking to achieve a balanced diet without compromising on taste or convenience. Food and drink companies are constantly reviewing their product portfolios to ensure that they provide diverse consumers with options that can help them to meet this goal.**

There are a number of innovative ways in which food and drink companies can approach new or existing products to meet the health and dietary needs of consumers. These include portion size and portion information.

According to FoodDrinkEurope<sup>1</sup>, a portion is the amount of a given food or drink reasonably expected to be consumed by an individual in a single serving.

Portion size is one of the effective levers to help reduce obesity and is a useful tool particularly in categories where reformulation is technically difficult to achieve.

A landmark study by McKinsey Global Institute<sup>2</sup> examined 74 anti-obesity interventions for impact and cost effectiveness. A broad array of interventions were found to have a high impact on obesity in a cost-effective way, including reformulation, weight management programmes, parental education, school curriculum, bariatric surgery, labelling of food, active transport, and public health campaigns.

The highest ranked intervention for estimated impact across the full population was portion control.



1. Food Drink Europe (2017): Eat and Live Well
2. Dobbs, R., Sawyers, C. and Thompson, et al., McKinsey Global Institute (2014): Overcoming obesity: an initial economic analysis.

# The portion size toolkit

**Food Drink Ireland (FDI) members understand the impact that portion and pack sizes can have on consumption. They want to enable consumers to recognise the important role that appropriate portions play in our diets.**

In order to empower consumers, food and drink companies provide on-pack guidance to help consumers understand the nutritional composition of a product so that they can make informed choices. There are both mandatory and voluntary elements that provide this information to consumers.

FDI members are at the forefront of portion size innovations across a variety of categories and product formats. A selection of initiatives that have been used by food and drink companies in Ireland are outlined below.

## Tools for single-serving products:

- Introduction of smaller, more convenient single-serving products
- Best practice on calorie caps for single-serving products, with lower caps for products for children



## Tools for multi-serving products:

- Visual aids on pack to help consumers recognise a responsible portion size
- Division of the product into portions within a larger pack
- A variety of re-closable packaging formats, which allow consumers to enjoy a portion of the products while keeping the rest of the contents fresh for consumption at a later time
- Providing a breakdown of nutrition information per portion on the front and back of pack – this is not required, but can be provided on a voluntary basis



Industry is also supportive of initiatives such as the British Nutrition Foundation Quality Calorie (QC) concept which encourages us to not just look at the number of calories we consume, but also the quality of our diet to help us on the path to get enough of the nutrients that we need (including vitamins, minerals and fibre)<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, the BNF launched a practical guide to portion sizes: Find Your Balance<sup>4</sup>, to help consumers understand not just which foods to eat, but how often and in what quantities, in order to maintain a healthy weight and have a balanced diet.

3. British Nutrition Foundation (2018) The Quality Calorie Concept

4. British Nutrition Foundation (2019) Find Your Balance

# Category considerations

**There is no one-size-fits-all approach to improving the nutritional value of products and portion size plays a key role in the food and drink sector.**

Portion size is important for many foods, but it is particularly relevant for 'treat' categories such as confectionery and savoury snacks. Focusing on portion size can allow consumers to continue to enjoy their favourite products, in appropriate quantities, as part of a balanced diet.

Significant reformulation is often hard to achieve in these categories, due to technical challenges. Gaining consumer acceptance of reformulated 'treat' products is also difficult, with high levels of rejection or low sales volume as products often do not meet consumer expectations for taste and texture. This is where the industry focus on portion size can offer a solution, with many consumers preferring to have a small portion of an indulgent product as an occasional treat.

A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan<sup>5</sup> acknowledges the important role that portion size control can play in addressing obesity. It is vital that this is reflected in public health policy initiatives.

5. Department of Health (2016): A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan, Ireland



# Consumer acceptance

**The support of all stakeholders, including government, is needed to encourage consumer acceptance of reduced portion sizes. Recent research by FSA NI<sup>6</sup> showed lower acceptance of portion size changes than other types of reformulation among consumers. Collective efforts to educate consumers on portion size will be a key driver of impact.**

Companies within the food and drink industry have also been accused of “shrinkflation” in the past, a process in which it is negatively perceived that products are made smaller but are still sold at the same price. In the food and drink industry specifically, this term ignores the work of companies to reduce portion size in order to help consumers to recognise the appropriate portion of their products.

Reducing portion size is one of many tools to address the issue of obesity, offering smaller portion size and offering increased choice for consumers across a range of formats. FDI and members call on government for support in communicating to consumers the growing need to be aware of how portion size plays a role in a balanced diet.

## **A global approach**

Product innovation allows food and drink companies to continue to produce consumers’ favourite products with the same great taste whilst also playing their part in contributing to public health.

FDI members are part of a number of initiatives across the EU and UK. These include the British Nutrition Foundation’s “Find your balance”<sup>7</sup> guide to portion size that aims to help consumers find the right dietary balance and IGD, a commercial insight and social impact organisation, launched a portion size guide for food businesses to help them review and set portion sizes<sup>8</sup>. FDI members have been recognised for their work on portion size by FoodDrinkEurope as part of their Eat & Live Well initiative<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, Treatwell and BeTreatwise are industry initiatives that enable consumers to make informed choices on treat foods.

6. FSA NI (2018): Northern Ireland consumer perceptions of reformulation of food

7. British Nutrition Foundation (2018): Find your balance

8. IGD (2019) Portion Size Guide for Industry

9. Food Drink Europe (2017): Eat and Live Well

# Conclusion

## FDI member companies want to play their role to educate consumers on portion size and the potential impact on health.

Obesity is a complex, multi-faceted, societal challenge. Different approaches are needed to address it and portion size clearly has an important role to play, especially in categories where it is difficult to reformulate. It allows consumers to continue to enjoy their favourite products in appropriate quantities as a part of a balanced diet.



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FDI is the main trade association for the food and drink industry in Ireland. It represents the interests of over 150 food, drink and non-food grocery manufacturers and suppliers.

FDI provides leadership and direction on a number of key strategic issues, including the economic importance and reputation of the sector, competitiveness, innovation, trade, skills, regulation and general food chain policy.