Serving size â€¦ so it goes

by Jason_Love

It used to be that I judged a food by two criteria: the picture on the label and how happy it made my mouth. I didnâ€™t gain weight because I didnâ€™t know better.

Then, one dark day, the FDA passed a law about Nutrition Facts, and foods were either â€œgoodâ€• or â€œbad.â€• In case you forget which is which, thereâ€™s a formula: If it tastes good, itâ€™s bad, and if it tastes bad, itâ€™s good. The perfect meal consists of cardboard and waterâ€”but not too much!

In my opinion, foods arenâ€™t inherently bad; they are just a product of their environment. So instead of dieting, I took other measures. I ate junk food extra-fast to sneak it past my brain; I ordered unsliced pizza so that it was, officially, one piece; I neutralized my cheeseburgers with Diet Coke.

On account of my new â€œwaste line,â€• today I pay attention, a fate worse than fat. Every week they add a new name to the Black List, foods thou shalt not eat without going to confession. It started with candy bars and French fries but has, like a witch hunt, come to include foods that grow right out of the dirt. I canâ€™t order a sandwich anymore without someone suggesting that I remove the bread!

Next week theyâ€™ll report that the air itself is fattening.

It is with a grain of salt, then, that I read Nutrition Facts. Wait. Sodium is bad for me. I read them with a flake of Mrs. Dash non-salt substitute.

Recently I purchased cookies from a health food store, or as my observant niece calls it, the â€œhell food store.â€• The Nutrition Facts said the cookies were Good, so I cleared the shelf into my cart (you never know when youâ€™ll encounter Good cookies again).

Delighting in my darlings at home, I reread the label just for fun. It was then I stumbled on the fine printâ€¦

Servings per container: five.

Five servings per two cookies?! Could that be right? Five doesnâ€™t even go into two. For me, the word serving has always suggested completion. One meal equals one serving. If I go for seconds, Iâ€™m having two servings, and thatâ€™s my prerogative as an adult who buys these damn groceries and has had a tough day, all right?

My biggest fear is that someday, when Iâ€™m not paying attention, I will eat a cookie with 16 billion servings and have to be carried away in a stretcher.

In a rare departure from my normal fluff, I phoned the FDA. I wanted to hear it from the horseâ€™s mouth (or in this case, the horseâ€™s other opening). After waiting on hold long enough to raise children, I was told that serving sizes are based on â€œstandard amounts derived from surveys conducted by the U.S. government.â€•

Who were they surveying, two-year-olds? As part of my â€œresearch,â€• I bought a bag of Doritos, the stale kind you find at the gas station. Three servings per bag and most of it air. How long before they advertise, No fat. No calories. No anything at all. Bag oâ€™ Air!

Perhaps it is time for the Food and Drug Administration to narrow its field of interest. Iâ€™m starting to think they are on drugs as they administer food.

The FDA rep said that small businesses, the kind that supply hell food stores, are exempt from label laws. Why, then, did the cookie folks bother toâ€”Aaaaah. It hit me like a ton of lard. They create Nutrition Facts but skip the guidelines, serving size be damned.

Could they do that?

â€œYes, sir, technically they could, so long as the product doesnâ€™t claim weight-loss.â€•

Welcome to the loophole, a popular hangout for attorneys. It smacked of the time we lobbied to lower the volume of commercials, the greatest television victory since they canceled â€œIrkel.â€• No sooner had the stations complied than some wicked man thought, What if we just lowered the volume of regular programmingâ€¦ And arbitration began anew. So it goes.

I called the cookie people, but they wouldnâ€™t comment. In fact, they wouldnâ€™t be polite.

As I did the serving size math, I remembered a truth of the universe: There is no such thing as health cookies.

There is either eating sweets or not eating sweets. Since I am not good at the latter, I collected the packages and, with a sigh â€¦ tossed my cookies.

I have since designed for the FDA a proposal that will require label makers to live by their own serving sizes. The cookie people, for instance, will receive two-fifths of a cookie for lunch and then back to work, the whole thing on surveillance. If the label maker dies of hunger, we leave his body where it falls as a reminder to the next guy.

Barring that, I think we should include a second label called Nutrition Fiction, for those of us who would really rather not know.

Serving size â€¦ so it goes by Jason_Love