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A comparison of portion size differences in unpackaged bakery products in Ireland from 1997–2011

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Portion size estimation in dietary surveys relies heavily on the use of photographic atlases and typical food portion sizes (35.7% in the most recent Irish Adult Survey)⁽¹⁾. For many foods, particularly unpackaged food products, obtaining typical portion sizes is quite subjective. One such area is bakery goods, due to the variation in sizes available to the consumer across numerous types of retail outlets (delis, bakeries, supermarkets etc.). Recent data, where available, were collected (2010–11) on the portion size of bakery products from three large supermarkets, convenience stores and independent bakeries in Ireland for comparison with data collected at approximately the time of the North South Ireland Food consumption Survey NSIFCS (1997/1999)⁽¹⁾. All packaging and wrapping were removed and products were weighed in duplicate. Portion sizes were assumed to be the total weight of each unwrapped product as purchased from the outlet. Mean portion sizes were derived. Although the exact protocols used in the earlier survey are not known, it is assumed that the foods would have been weighted in a similar manner.

Bakery good	1997/9	Mean (g)		n	% Change
		n	2010/1		
Soft brown rolls	68	1	76	3	12
Croissants	44	3	60	7	36
Danish pastries	47	1	94	8	100
Scones, fruit	82	2	111	7	35
Doughnut, jam (with & without cream)	29	1	68	10	135
Éclairs	40	1	96	4	140
Muffins	50	1	124	6	148
Scone, plain	68	2	112	4	65

n denotes number of products for which we have weights for, (g) denotes mean portion size in grams.

All food types increased in mean portion size. Soft brown rolls increased the least by 12% while muffins increased the most by 148%. Croissant and fruit scone weights increased by one-third, plain scones by two-thirds, while éclairs, jam doughnuts, danish pastries and muffins were more than double the weight now compared to the late 90's. It is worth noting, that although increases are large, sample sizes were small and is a major limitation of this research. In comparison to typical portion sizes of similar foods reported in the U.K.⁽²⁾ from the 1970's until 2008, typical Irish portion sizes vary greatly, as does the order of increasing and decreasing trends. For example, in the early 90's, the U.K had mean portion sizes of 50–60 grams for croissants, which decreased to 45–52 grams in 2008 for a “standard croissant”, while in contrast, Irish values were 44 g in the late 90's, increasing to 60 grams in 2010–2011. Our analysis provides a brief snapshot of how portion sizes of unpackaged bakery goods have varied over the last 10 years. While the approach is crude, it highlights the need for further research to obtain comprehensive data on the range of portion sizes of bakery goods.

1. www.iuna.net

2. Church S (2008) Report to the Food Standards Agency.