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Secular trends in the serving sizes of published UK and Irish recipes

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The increasing portion sizes of foods available in the marketplace today have influenced the amount of food being served in the home^(1,2), and therefore overall energy intake⁽³⁾. Research from the US has recently demonstrated an increase in the serving size (SS) of classic recipes published in one cookbook over the last 70 years⁽⁴⁾, however, it is unclear if similar trends are also apparent in the UK and Ireland. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to assess changes in the SS and energy content of recipes published in UK and Irish cookery books.

Forty-nine cookery books published between 1959 and 2010 were available, and common recipes were identified in the books published earlier (traditional) and those published more recently (recent). Ingredient weights in the recipes were standardised to grams (g) and recipes were entered into NetWISP (Tinuviel Software, Warrington, UK) for analysis of SS (g) and energy content (kJ per serving).

Common recipes were identified from 21 of the 49 cookery books and the mean difference in years between the traditional and recently published recipes was 27.5 years (range 11–46 years). Recipes were classified by type of meal (i.e. main meal, side dish or dessert).

	n	Recipes				Difference*	
		Traditional		Recent		Median	IQR
		Median	IQR	Median	IQR		
Serving Size (g)							
All recipes	23	313	264	281	176	21	150
Main meals	13	367	83	404	241	47	90
Side Dishes	6	133	295	152	118	3	143
Desserts	4	157	62	233	46	51	54

* Positive value means recipe has increased over time, and vice versa.

No significant differences between traditional and recent recipes ($P > 0.05$, Mann-Whitney U).

In all recipes included, there was a small non-significant increase in the median SS over time, which was most apparent within the main meals and dessert recipes. The median energy content per serving in the main meals and dessert recipes also showed a non-significant increase over time, by 12% and 55% respectively. Overall, 70% of the recipes increased in SS, and 61% increased in energy per serving over time.

In conclusion, a general pattern for increasing SS and consequently increasing energy content per serving was apparent from the small selection of recipes identified. Future studies should include additional recipes to confirm the observed increasing trends in commonly published recipes from the UK and Ireland.

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