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Cafe Culture: A Fattening Addiction

by Alicia Crocket

Nineties food, according to Google, was all about pre-packaged snacks and sugary drinks in various forms. What I most fondly remember from the 90s was the beginning of coffee and café culture in NZ. It amazes me that NZ has become one of the leading coffee nations in the world in such a short space of time. All it takes is a trip overseas to discover just how amazing and reliable our coffee is. So much so, that the flat white (our very own Kiwi invention) has been exported and was introduced into London by Starbucks and other big chains this year.

For a self-confessed coffee snob like me, coffee is the most important determinant of a café experience, but for many people it's the food that clinches the deal. I think NZ has perfected the art of having delicious and fresh meals and snacks available in cafes. No other country I've been to has served the beautiful brunches we take completely for granted in NZ. Scones and muffins are by far better here than other places and the selection of speciality sandwiches always means there's something I want.

Alas though, in one area NZ café culture has let me down ? portion size inflation. In the 90s when cafes started up, coffees were 250ml max. These days if you order a coffee, you have to specify small to get a 250ml coffee. Many cafes use a 350 ? 500ml cup as their standard size, while others offer coffees in pint-sized takeaway cups. Who needs a pint of beer, when you can have a pint of coffee? To give you an idea of how much "extra" you might be getting from your daily coffee hit, a grande, blue milk caramel mocha with cream from Starbucks has all your daily sugar recommendation and half your daily fat allowance! Coffee isn't the only thing that has suffered portion inflation in the last decade. The serving size of food has also significantly increased. Your average plate of Eggs Benedict with bacon and Hollandaise sauce gives you more than your daily fat recommendation and approximately half the calories most people should have in a day. Snacks have also significantly increased in size, with muffins nearly doubling over the last 10 years. This increase means that rather than being a quick snack at morning or afternoon tea, muffins are now more equivalent to a lunch sized meal.

It isn't all doom and gloom though. The happy news is that, if you're like me and a café meal/coffee happens only when I find someone else to pay for it, then I wouldn't worry too much about it. Well, if generally you have a healthier diet anyway. It only becomes a concern when you pop in for a large, full fat, three sugared coffee with a buttered muffin every day. You're adding huge amounts of calories, fat and sugar to your diet that probably isn't necessary. If you want to keep your café fare within limits, some things I suggest trying are:

- ? have a smaller coffee
 - ? get a trim milk coffee (that removes nearly all the fat and nearly halves the calorie content),
 - ? reduce sugar in your coffee gradually by ½ a teaspoon a week/month,
 - ? Share your muffin with a friend
 - ? Don't have the butter/margarine, if you warm the muffin or scone it should be lovely and moist
- So enjoy the great café culture that NZ has, but keep in mind that sometimes you might be getting more than you bargained for.