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Twinkie diet helps nutrition professor lose 27 pounds

By Madison Park, CNN

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KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Nutrition professor's "convenience store diet" helped him shed 27 pounds

Haub limited himself to 1,800 calories and two-thirds come from junk food

Haub said it's too early to draw any conclusions about diet

(CNN) -- Twinkies. Nutty bars. Powdered donuts.

For 10 weeks, Mark Haub, a professor of human nutrition at Kansas State University, ate one of these sugary cakelets every three hours, instead of meals. To add variety in his steady stream of Hostess and Little Debbie snacks, Haub munched on Doritos chips, sugary cereals and Oreos, too.

His premise: That in weight loss, pure calorie counting is what matters most -- not the nutritional value of the food.

The premise held up: On his "convenience store diet," he shed 27 pounds in two months.

For a class project, Haub limited himself to less than 1,800 calories a day. A man of Haub's pre-dieting size usually consumes about 2,600 calories daily. So he followed a basic principle of weight loss: He consumed significantly fewer calories than he burned.

His body mass index went from 28.8, considered overweight, to 24.9, which is normal. He now weighs 174 pounds.

But you might expect other indicators of health would have suffered. Not so.

Haub's "bad" cholesterol, or LDL, dropped 20 percent and his "good" cholesterol, or HDL, increased by 20 percent. He reduced the level of triglycerides, which are a form of fat, by 39 percent.

"That's where the head scratching comes," Haub said. "What does that mean? Does that mean I'm healthier? Or does it mean how we

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define health from a biology standpoint, that we're missing something?"

Haub's sample day

Espresso, Double: 6 calories; 0 grams of fat

Hostess Twinkies Golden Sponge Cake: 150 calories; 5 grams of fat

Centrum Advanced Formula From A To Zinc: 0 calories; 0 grams of fat

Little Debbie Star Crunch: 150 calories; 6 grams of fat

Hostess Twinkies Golden Sponge Cake: 150 calories; 5 grams of fat

Diet Mountain Dew: 0 calories; 0 grams of fat

Doritos Cool Ranch: 75 calories; 4 grams of fat

Kellogg's Corn Pops: 220 calories; 0 grams of fat

whole milk: 150 calories; 8 grams of fat

baby carrots: 18 calories; 0 grams of fat

Duncan Hines Family Style Brownie Chewy Fudge: 270 calories; 14 grams of fat

Little Debbie Zebra Cake: 160 calories; 8 grams of fat

Muscle Milk Protein Shake: 240 calories; 9 grams of fat

Totals: 1,589 calories and 59 grams of fat

Despite his temporary success, Haub does not recommend replicating his snack-centric diet.

"I'm not geared to say this is a good thing to do," he said. "I'm stuck in the middle. I guess that's the frustrating part. I can't give a concrete answer. There's not enough information to do that."

Two-thirds of his total intake came from junk food. He also took a multivitamin pill and drank a protein shake daily. And he ate vegetables, typically a can of green beans or three to four celery stalks.

Families who live in food deserts have limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, so they often rely on the kind of food Haub was eating.

"These foods are consumed by lots of people," he said. "It may be an issue of portion size and moderation rather than total removal. I just think it's unrealistic to expect people to totally drop these foods for vegetables and fruits. It may be healthy, but not realistic."

Haub's body fat dropped from 33.4 to 24.9 percent. This posed the question: What matters more for weight loss, the quantity or quality of calories?

His success is probably a result of caloric reduction, said Dawn Jackson Blatner, a dietitian based in Atlanta, Georgia.

"It's a great reminder for weight loss that calories count," she said. "Is that the bottom line to being healthy? That's another story."

Blatner, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association, said she's not surprised to hear Haub's health markers improved even when he loaded up on processed snack cakes.

Being overweight is the central problem that leads to complications like high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol, she said.

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"When you lose weight, regardless of how you're doing it -- even if it's with packaged foods, generally you will see these markers improve when weight loss has improved," she said.

Before jumping on the Ding Dong bandwagon, Blatner warned of health concerns.

"There are things we can't measure," said Blatner, questioning how the lack of fruits and vegetables could affect long-term health. "How much does that affect the risk for cancer? We can't measure how diet changes affect our health."

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I was eating healthier, but I wasn't healthy. I was eating too much.

--Professor Mark Haub



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On August 25, Haub, 41, started his cake diet focusing on portion control.

"I'm eating to the point of need and pushing the plate or wrapper away," he said.

He intended the trial to last a month as a teaching tool for his class. As he lost weight, Haub continued the diet until he reached a normal body mass index.

Before his Twinkie diet, he tried to eat a healthy diet that included whole grains, dietary fiber, berries and bananas, vegetables and occasional treats like pizza.

"There seems to be a disconnect between eating healthy and being healthy," Haub said. "It may not be the same. I was eating healthier, but I wasn't healthy. I was eating too much."

He maintained the same level of moderate physical activity as before going on the diet. (Haub does not have any ties to the snack cake companies.)

To avoid setting a bad example for his kids, Haub ate vegetables in front of his family. Away from the dinner table, he usually unwrapped his meals.

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Haub monitored his body composition, blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose, and updated his progress on his Facebook page, [Professor Haub's diet experiment](#).

To curb calories, he avoided meat, whole grains and fruits. Once he started adding meat into the diet four weeks ago, his cholesterol level increased.

Haub plans to add about 300 calories to his daily intake now that he's done with the diet. But he's not ditching snack cakes altogether. Despite his weight loss, Haub feels ambivalence.

"I wish I could say the outcomes are unhealthy. I wish I could say it's healthy. I'm not confident enough in doing that. That frustrates a lot of people. One side says it's irresponsible. It is unhealthy, but the data doesn't say that."

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antezinzin

Sounds kind of what my

Grandfather did to my dad when he caught him smoking a cigar. Dad was about 10 or 12 and Grandpa made him smoke the whole box (all 25) one right after the next, non stop, to this day my father has not smoked. This diet sounds like a cure for the sweet tooth in anyone. lol

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Guest

This story proves once again, that dieting should NOT be a one size fits all plan. Different diets for different folks. People just need to eat enough to live; it is written in the Bible where John the Baptist lived on locusts and wild honey, so there you go.

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kloneranger

Aside from myself (because I know everything) I have to laugh at all the people posting comments who in some way or another think they're qualified to say what was done right and what was done wrong in this experiment. It's over. Get lives and move on. lol goobs.

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kloneranger

Seems that all the diet gurus and organic-pushers are getting a little testy in this matter. Of course he lost weight, he stopped eating more food than his body needed to function. It doesn't matter what you eat, if you eat less you lose weight. If you lose weight (fat) then the markers for your ... [more](#)

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GeorgeWB

I don't doubt that they're mad. The Diet Trip is a huge gravy train. All the special food for the latest fads costs a fortune & then there's THE BOOK @ 49.95.

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Kortez3000

I'ma go loose some weight now, and possibly contract diabetes.

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veggiedude

Duh! Of course it is caloric intake that matters, so if you are seriously reducing them to lose weight it is vital to get the most nutrition as possible by eating sensibly. This guy is risking his health living on pure sugar if he were to sustain it for a lot longer.

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NapoleonIII

As long as this professor doesn't plead the twinkie defence!!! Remember that murderer who blamed everything on those damned twinkies? Haw haw

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lyghthowse

Well, I have a reminder for Mr. Haub. His body is a product of evolutionary adaptation and evolution until very recently did not include "Twinkies" as a staple. I would be very careful drawing any conclusions on everyday diet from his experiment. The only thing that is likely applicable is the ef... [more](#)

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shandi41

He may have lost weight, but I still say he did not lose it in a healthy way. What has this done to his glucose levels and overall, his insulin production? You do NOT mess with insulin, as it seems to be the hormone that ultimately controls everything else in our bodies. All of those carbs ingest... [more](#)

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thesuperfe

I've lost weight on 2 occasions with pure calorie counting (no exercise routine, no special diet). It doesn't make you healthier in any aspect except that you lose weight (if you are overweight). And of course, if you want to be overall healthy, you have to do other things, including addressing WHY... [more](#)

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rhymebomb

I have a similar story. I lost 40 pounds through a strict exercise routine. Other than changing up pop for diet pop, I made no changes to my diet. And my diet is has always been pretty bad. Greasy food and sugar tastes too damn good to give up, especially if I'm healthy enough exercising.

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shelby828

I meant they didn't mention his fasting blood glucose levels***

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shelby828

He is practicing portion control-- prior to this "diet". He may have eaten healthier food but if you don't practice portion control it's unhealthy. If he did the same thing with nutrient dense foods he would have even more benefits... cholesterol lowering foods like oatmeal, heart healthy fats, canc... [more](#)

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Guest

Interesting that his cholesterol went up when he started eating meat again.

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thrashertr

I can confirm that this really works. I lost a lot of weight by under consuming total calories, even while I was eating up to 800 calories right before going to sleep!

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guest24

Intake versus calories burned. Interesting. Hopefully, there will be a follow up research done that will educate us what would happen by eating the same foods/snacks, but this time add 1,200 calories to his previous intake of 2,600 calories daily.

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missgina

This kind of information can really confuse people, especially young adults who are so body conscious. An obese person can have malnutrition, because calories do NOT equal vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants, live enzymes...etc. So, ya you can just count calories but to be healthy your body nee... [more](#)

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FastRider

You missed the point of the article. He isn't advocating this as a diet. He's merely proving that it's not what you eat that make you lose weight, it's simply the number of calories you eat.

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yakky

Good point, and notice the health markers listed in the article tell nothing about whether his body is getting the right nutrients. Cholesterol test: useless test based on a study of old men that already had heart attacks (in other words, not like any group of people on Earth). Glucose test: usele... more

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• **SoSnTX**

Hence the vegetables he ate and the multi-vitamins. Next time, read the whole article.

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• **minnman12**

Horribly inaccurate article for a number of reasons. The man starved himself basically for two months. He only ate veggies and these junk foods, but buried in the story is his sticking to 1800 calories per day. Well, uh duh. This is not news. Everyone already knows that calorie counting leads t... more

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• **MARKsays**

@minnman12 There are 150 calories in 1 Twinkie. I'd say 8-12 of these a day (gross!) would not be considered starvation..especially when a cup of Broccoli is only 31 calories. Plus, if you search for calorie calculators online you'll see that an average man (with little or no exercise) doesn't have ... more

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• **thesuperfe**

@yakky unfortunately not everyone knows that starving yourself is not good. i do agree that calorie counting is what matters most in regards to weight loss, from experience. BUT weight loss without considering on your overall health is foolish and can be dangerous - and I think that a lot of people ... more

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• **FastRider**

It isn't a necessarily well know proven fact that it's only calories that matter or there wouldn't be so many crazy diets out there like Adkins, etc.

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