

# The caloric math of huge burgers

May 14 2015, by Dr Jamie Burr

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Last month in PEI we "celebrated" what has become an annual ritual known as Burger Love. If you are not familiar with the concept, it is an event sponsored by various government industries and the PEI beef farmers to promote local meat consumption. Restaurants across the island prepare extravagant burgers, and after eating them (at \$15/piece) the patrons rank them online so that a winner is crowned at the end of the month. Let me say upfront, that I don't think this is a bad promotion overall – and for full disclosure I will admit that I tried a burger or two myself (usually shared with my wife) and they were quite tasty.

Like anything, however, Burger Love may best be enjoyed in moderation. Whether or not moderation was practiced is up for debate, but given that 145,527 burgers (65,068 lb of beef) were sold, at a rate of almost 5,000/day in a province of only 150,000 people, I find it hard to make that case. Compounding this effect, the Guinness record attempt for 24hr burger consumption saw 9,000 burgers consumed in this time. I'm not certain that this is something we ought to be particularly proud of – but my opinion may differ from the large majority.

As a health/performance physiologist, what jumped out at me was the size and relative caloric density of these burgers, many of which contain multiple meat paddies, and sugar/fat based glazes, sauces and toppings. Using the [Dieticians of Canada "eaTracker" software](#), I calculated an average Burger Love meal to fall anywhere between 1500 to 2500 kcal ranging from the somewhat modest to more lavish creations. No big deal though- you can just exercise a little more than normal and burn it off....right?

Maybe.

Through the month of burger lovin, it occurred to me that the caloric math was probably not at the forefront of many diners' minds nor did it play prominently in the decision process of where or what to eat. So, for the sake of illumination, I thought it helpful to show just how much of an impact a single burger love could have on caloric balance, and how long you would need to exercise to get back to a zero-gain. For the following calculations I have made a few assumptions to represent the "average" person, which errs on the side of conservatism. Our fictitious person is a 30yr old male, of near average height (5'11") and weight (170lb).

At a modest pace of 3mph, it would take approximately 420min (7hrs) of continuous walking. But perhaps that's a silly comparison, because many fit 30-somethings would have no problem "upping" the intensity. If our burger-lover were to jog at a moderate pace it would only take him 280 min (>4.5hr) or if he ran at 7mph, he could cut the time of burger loss to a mere 160 min (2.7hr). Obviously, running is not for everyone, perhaps a leisurely 3hr cycle (at 23-26km/h) is more your style. Prefer to swim? No problem, at a moderate pace you could burn off half of a [burger](#) in a mere 160 min (2.6hr).

So, does this mean you shouldn't ever eat a hamburger? Of course not, you've got enjoy life and good food can certainly contribute to mental (and even physical) well-being. But understanding the idea of caloric balance (even if it's as simple as calories in vs. calories out) might be an important consideration. But on the bright side, you've got a whole 11 months to burn it off before next year. Unfortunately, we might need it.

Interested in figuring out more about the energy costs of certain physical activities? Check out the American College of Sports Medicine "Compendium of Physical Activities" which can be found [here](#) in hard

copy, or [here](#) as an online tool.

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