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According to a large national survey, nutrient-poor food (or “junk food”) is responsible for almost 30% of the calories in an average American diet.

JUNK FOOD COMPRISES NEARLY ONE-THIRD OF CALORIES IN AMERICAN DIET

Research out of the University of California, Berkeley reveals that nearly a third of American’s calories come from “empty calorie” foods such as sweets and desserts, soft drinks, and alcoholic beverages, with another 5% coming from salty snacks and fruit-flavored drinks. Lead researcher Gladys Block, a professor of epidemiology and public health nutrition at the university, used data previously collected as part of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). Block analyzed responses from 4,700 adult participants who were asked to report everything they had consumed in the previous 24 hours.

"We know people are eating a lot of junk food, but to have almost one-third of Americans’ calories coming from those categories is a shocker. It's no wonder there's an obesity epidemic in this country," Block said in a statement.

Sodas contributed 7.1 percent of the total calories consumed. By category, “sweets” topped the list, followed by hamburgers, pizza, and potato chips.

Fruits and vegetables made up a mere 10 percent of calories in the average diet.

"It's important to emphasize that sweets, desserts, snacks, and alcohol are contributing calories without providing vitamins and minerals," said Block. "You can actually be obese and still be undernourished with regard to important nutrients. We shouldn't be telling people to eat less, we should be telling people to eat differently."

< Block G. Foods contributing to energy intake in the US: data from NHANES III and NHANES 1999–2000. 2004. J Food Composition Analysis 17(3-4):439-47. >