

Petite Competitive Eater Defies Laws of Metabolism

By ACSH Staff — March 7, 2016



[1] Competitive eating via Shutterstock

David “Coondog” O’Karma. Ed “Cookie” Jarvis. Joey “Jaws” Chestnut.

Based on the names of these characters, you’d probably want to tell them how to get to Sesame Street before learning that they’re some of the most celebrated warriors in the [professional competitive eating](#) [2] circuit. And they aren’t just signing up for your typical, down-home, pie-eating contest. We’re talking about internationally ranked pros who are making a living by stuffing their faces.

Hot dogs, chili, chicken wings and tamales are just some of the food face-offs a competitive eater may enter in a single season.

And that season can be lucrative; winning an event can be worth up to \$20,000, or more. But there’s definitely a price to pay, as the sport (yes, it’s considered a sport) has its health concerns. It’s surprising to us that some of these guys (and gals) don’t just keel over after they finish, whatever the dish of the day might be.

We recently [published an article on competitive eating](#) [3], but we wanted to revisit this topic because there’s one competitor in particular who we just don’t know what to make of. She is Molly (she needs a nickname like “Jaws” so let’s try “The Bottomless Pit”) Schuyler.

Schuyler stands 5-foot-7 and weighs in at just 125 pounds, plus or minus whatever she may have eaten when she is in a contest.

One of her most remarkable feats, as catalogued by [CNN.com](#) [4], took place last spring at the Big Texan Steak Ranch contest in Amarillo, Texas, when Schuyler scarfed down:

- three, 72-ounce steaks
- three baked potatoes

- three side salads
- three dinner rolls
- three shrimp cocktails

All in under 20 minutes.

This left us scratching our heads in incredulity. How does someone manage to eat so much, yet maintain such a healthy physique? So let's take a closer look at the physical and metabolic underpinnings of a competitive eater, to learn how Schuyler stays slim.

A 2013 paper entitled, "Competitive consumption: Ten minutes. 20,000 calories. Long-term trouble," published in *Canadian Medical Association Journal* sought to get to the bottom of it, but, as it turns out, there is no evidence. Just speculation as to how these individuals — including Schuyler — defy the laws of metabolics.

"The bottom line is, there is such minimal data that we are doing a lot of conjecture," says David Metz, professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, who contributed to a [study of competitive eating](#) [5].

Metz's study did however, go on to hypothesize that competitive eaters, in general, tend to (1) have [suppressed gag reflexes](#) [6]; (2) are better able to control their esophagi; and (3) have stomachs with unique metabolic and structural properties — which includes the ability to greatly expand.

Anecdotal evidence by eaters themselves suggest that the amount of calories consumed is markedly disproportionate to the amount that are actually used by their bodies, or stored (e.g. fat) to be burned later.

"There are only so many calories you can consume in 10 minutes," says Peter Czerwinski, aka "Furious" Pete. "A lot of stuff goes through undigested."

But *where* does it go?

Many would assume that competitive eaters either throw up or experience [dumping syndrome](#) [7] as a way to rid their bodies of the massive quantities of food and avoid caloric gain. But in speaking to NBC's [Today.com](#) [6], Metz dispelled this myth.

"They don't eat often; when they eat, they want to eat as much as (they) possibly can," he said. "Non-speed eaters would experience diarrhea trying to process this much food, but competitive eaters don't. Following an event, they don't eat and when they resume eating, they eat sparingly."

So, while the quantity of food eaten in a given bout is nothing short of extraordinary, these instances are spaced out, which might explain why many competitive eaters are of healthy weight — even petite, like Schuyler.

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[2] <http://www.majorleagueeating.com/>

[3] <http://acsh.org/news/2016/02/13/water-tops-list-health-concerns-competitive-eaters/>

[4] <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/20/living/steak-eating-contest-molly-schuyler-feat/>

[5] <http://www.ajronline.org/doi/abs/10.2214/AJR.07.2342>

[6] <http://www.today.com/health/inside-body-speed-eater-how-do-they-do-it-1D79878634>

[7] <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dumping-syndrome/basics/definition/con-20028034>