

On 2,200-Mile Run, Eating Bacon, Candy & Ice Cream is All OK



By Erik Lief — September 21, 2016



Courtesy Red Bull Content Pool [1]

Karl Meltzer's newest feat, setting the land speed record traversing the Appalachian Trail from Maine to Georgia, was unquestionably remarkable and therefore newsworthy. Yet among its media coverage, two of the most prominent reports played up the angle that one particular aspect of his achievement — the ultra runner's food consumption during his historic dash — was quirky, out of the ordinary, and in some ways bizarre.

However, for the most part, that was just not the case.

The [Atlanta Journal Constitution](#) [2] and [The New York Times](#) [3] crafted headlines, that while not inaccurate, could be considered misleading (especially for their millions of combined readers scanning the headlines) in that they implied that the lean, 48-year-old's dietary choices were somewhat ill-conceived.

The primary reason Meltzer's food and drink consumption was not an issue is due to the fact that during his "speedy" 2,190-mile journey — which took just 45 days, 22 hours and 38 minutes — the 141-pound, Sandy, Utah resident burned a ridiculous amount of calories. And in order to have that many calories to burn, the former ski-resort bartender had to consume a massive amount of fuel for a trek that *averaged* nearly 47 miles per day.

Let that sink in: constantly moving, covering 47 miles a day for 46 straight days.

While it was Meltzer's third attempt to break the A-Trail's record, it wasn't Meltzer's first rodeo, or mega-journey, or ultra-marathon. "In a sport built on comparatives — faster, longer, more, more, more — his 100-mile trail race portfolio is formidable," the *Times* wrote. "He has won 38 of them,

more than anyone else in the world." And if that doesn't impress you, Meltzer also "holds the world record for most golf holes played in 12 hours at 230," according to [Runner's World magazine](#) [4]. (So take that.)



Given his recent journey wasn't a one-time lark, it would seem that Meltzer, who goes by the nickname "Speedgoat," has a very good idea of how to approach — and overcome — incredible physical challenges. And if that means powering down candy bars and ice cream along the way, despite someone's misguided notion that those choices might be foolish during a grueling expedition, from a nutritional standpoint there's nothing wrong with them.

"A person who is so extremely active surely uses upwards of 5,000 calories per day," says Dr. Ruth Kava, Senior Fellow of Nutrition at the American Council for Science and Health. "Someone like this can afford some discretionary candy and soft drinks. Of course the devil is in the details in terms of the amounts of the different foods."

Culled from [a credible blog](#) [5] and news accounts of Meltzer's race against the clock, which began (in early August!) atop Maine's Mount Katahdin and ended in the pre-dawn hours last Sunday at the summit of Springer Mountain in North Georgia, here's some of what the Meltzer's support group served up for him to consume along the way:

FOOD

- Eggs
- Bacon
- Hash Browns
- Bread

- *Three Musketeers* Candy Bars
- *Spree* candy
- Sausage
- Chicken Drum Sticks
- Roasted Vegetables
- Mandarin Oranges
- *Turkey Hill* Ice Cream
- Fruit

DRINK

- *Red Bull* (caffeinated energy drink)
- *Dale's Pale Ale* (alcoholic)
- Water
- Coffee
- *Tang*

And as for Meltzer maintaining his stamina, Dr. Kava adds, "He would need to be sure he's getting an adequate amount of protein to maintain his muscles; which the animal foods listed would supply."

As for fluids, it appears caffeine figured prominently into Meltzer's fueling strategy, and according to the *Constitution* he consumed "the energy drink Red Bull, which he guzzled along the way; Red Bull underwrote part of the cost of his feat." How many did he "guzzle"? According to the *Times*, Meltzer "had an energy drink every 10 miles, downing about five a day."

At first blush, for the average runner downing that much — 400 milligrams of caffeine — it sounds a bit nutty, [since each 8.4 oz can contains 80 mgs](#) [6]. But the truth is that even that amount doesn't really constitute a problem for a middle-aged man in good physical condition.

"Up to 400 milligrams (mg) of caffeine a day appears to be safe for most healthy adults," [the Mayo Clinic states](#) [7] on its website. The organization adds that "even a little makes you jittery." But if you're walking-hiking-racing 47 miles a day, jittery is about as problematic as sweat on one's brow. That said, everyone's physical makeup is different, and each individual, especially athletes, need to be aware of caffeine's effects.

"Caffeine and stimulants need to be addressed with serious caution under the stress and strain of sports and rigorous, endurance activities," says ACSH's Dr. Jamie Wells, Director of Medicine. "With heat and increased cardiac output, these items can promote health problems, especially with the heart and kidneys — and if taken with other medicines."

From this distance we can't know what other health factors may be at play. But for these events, Meltzer travels with a support team which helps monitor his activity while watching for health problems. And by now, given that he's a veteran of these endurance contests, Meltzer is prepared and isn't jumping into them cold — with no idea what awaits him. That said, none of that can override his genetic background, which is important for Meltzer, and any athlete, to pay close attention to.

"If it were up to me, these athletes would have baseline and continued cardiac assessments by doctors," added Dr. Wells. "This is especially important with those having a family history of sudden, unexplained death of a young person, certain arrhythmias or enlarged heart conditions. And staying well-hydrated is crucial to keeping the kidneys functioning."

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- [4] <http://www.runnersworld.com/ultrarunning/ultrarunner-karl-meltzer-breaks-appalachian-trail-thru-hike-record>
- [5] <http://www.irunfar.com/2016/09/a-day-inside-karl-meltzers-appalachian-trail-record-attempt.html>
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