

# The New York Times

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FOOD

## Junk Food in the New Year

By **Nicholas Bakalar**

January 6, 2015 11:00 am

People buy extra groceries during the holidays, much of it junk food. But what happens once the holidays are over? They keep buying the extra junk, a new study has found.

Over eight months, researchers tracked 207 volunteer households, with purchases recorded by the store where they bought their groceries. They used a 0-to-3 scale to judge the relative nutrition of each purchase (for example, 0 for sugared soda; 3 for skim milk). The study was published in PLOS One.

Around Thanksgiving, spending began to increase. By Christmas week it had increased about 33 percent over the average preholiday week. After New Year's Day, spending dropped slightly, then increased again to a peak at the end of January, to even higher than Christmas week.

Over all, participants bought about 16 percent more calories during the holidays than earlier, and 91 percent of the increase came from high-calorie, low-nutrition foods.

“In the new year, people resolve to eat healthier,” said the lead author Lizzy Pope, an assistant professor of nutrition at the University of Vermont, “but they continue to buy unhealthy food that defeats their goals. We go on automatic pilot. If we can increase our conscious thought in the grocery store, that might be the first step in making our purchasing match up with the goals we set.”