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Gilmanton

Failed Atkins? Try the buffalo diet

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Concord Monitor photo/Ken Williams

Gary Hugelmann after his diet of Buffalo and exercise. He's snacking on Buffalo jerky.

[Zoom](#)

ring finger. Even on his broader middle finger, he has to be careful that the ring does not slide off during everyday activities, like taking off a pair of gloves.

Hugelmann's diet miracle is an unusual tale in an age of complicated Atkins and SouthBeach weight-loss plans. Quite simply, he says, buffalo saved his life. After switching to the other red meat, he lost 200 pounds.

Hugelmann, 47, learned to bake cream puffs at age 7. By high school, he weighed 235 pounds. "I love to cook and I love to eat," he said. And the weight kept piling on.

"You name (the diet), I tried it," said Hugelmann, of Gilmanton. "I've done the grapefruit diet. I've counted calories. I've done the water diet. Any of the fad diets, from high school on up." Nothing worked. Then he started eating buffalo, as much as a pound a day, and his

When Gary Hugelmann first inherited his father's onyx ring, he had no choice but to wear it on his pinkie. Even then, he said, it cut off his circulation.

Gary Hugelmann tried all sorts of diets without luck . . . until he discovered buffalo meat.

Just two years ago, "my fingers were sausages," Hugelmann said. Today, his keepsake ring is too loose to be worn on the

body fat melted off.

Hugelman began exercising regularly, building his stamina to the point where he was walking 20 to 40 miles a week. And he adopted a "modified Atkins diet," eschewing most carbohydrates. But he never got lower than 390 pounds.

Then, in the summer of 2001, he saw a help-wanted sign at the Healthy Buffalo, a small shop on Route 4 in Chichester. He'd tried buffalo before and liked it, though he never considered it might become a personal weight-loss magic bullet. He just figured that selling buffalo, ostrich and wild boar would be more fun than being a temp, his previous occupation.

Surrounded by product, Hugelman began eating buffalo on a daily basis, wiping beef off his menu. He quickly learned of the health benefits - according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, buffalo has one quarter the fat and two thirds the calories of beef, and one third the fat of chicken. But he'd grown resigned to the fact that he "just couldn't get rid of the weight." So it was with considerable surprise that he noticed, a couple months into the job, that his size-56-waist pants seemed loose.

From there, the weight continued to come off at a steady clip, with Hugelman shedding about 10 pounds a month before leveling off at 190, give or take a pound.

"He's half the man he used to be," said David Bicchieri, Hugelman's boss at the Healthy Buffalo.

"If it hadn't happened to me," Hugelman said, "I wouldn't believe it."

In addition to the lost pounds, Hugelman gained a half inch in height: Without the weight, he was able to stand up straighter: to 6-foot-1, rather than 6-foot-½-inch.

'Better than Jared'

Sometimes they joke about Hugelman being the game-eating version of "Jared from Subway." America's best-known stick-to-one-food dieter, Subway pitchman Jared Fogle lost 245 pounds and 26 waistline inches by eating nothing but low-fat subs every day for a year.

"Hey, I'm better than Jared," Hugelman said, grinning. "Eating better, anyway."

There is nothing so good as a succulent buffalo rib eye, Hugelman

said. Switching back from buffalo to beef, he said, would be "like going from a good steak house to eating at McDonald's." Buffalo has a sweeter, meatier flavor than beef, without being overly "gamy," he said. By comparison, beef now seems intolerably "greasy."

Most days, Hugelman starts off with a small bowl of oatmeal for breakfast. For lunch, he typically eats buffalo leftovers from the night before, maybe a burger or a small steak. Either that, or he'll dine on the buffalo stew or chili he tends to keep in a crock pot during the winter months.

For dinner, he'll eat a large buffalo steak or a pair of buffalo burgers, along with a salad or steamed vegetables. For snacks, he sticks to buffalo jerky, buffalo salami or buffalo bratwurst. He skips cookies, cakes and other "so-called 'bad carbs,'" save for the occasional corn chips. And a couple times a week, he'll replace a buffalo lunch or dinner with a salad.

"I do love salads," he said. "I could eat salads three meals a day."

Of course, he said, reconsidering, salad has nothing on buffalo. "No comparison - a good buffalo steak on any day," he said. "But you want to balance things."

Store owner Bicchieri focuses on the wholesale side of the operation, catering to some 50 restaurants and institutions. Hugelman mans the retail register, where he holds court with an easy smile and steady flow of conversation. He's part amiable sales clerk, part buffalo proselytizer. "I really, really love my job," he said. And he makes no secret of his weight loss: "I'm glad to share, because if it even wakes up one or two people to what they're doing to themselves, it's worth it."

A testimonial

A photo of the old Hugelman, squeezing the limits of a New Hampshire T-shirt, hangs on the wall of the store near an e-mail from a customer named John Rowe. Rowe, who had a history of high blood pressure and cholesterol, switched to buffalo after bypass surgery in 1997. Though doctors are skeptical to attribute the improvement to any one change, Rowe wrote that he was "convinced that buffalo meat" made the difference in lowering his risk of heart attack from 9:1 to 1:1.

Hugelman, who now keeps his diabetes under control without medication, can attest to his own health improvements - and to a 20-inch waistline reduction. "If I had kept going the way I was going,

I wouldn't be here anymore. I'd be in a wooden box," he said. As his health risks have decreased, his morale and confidence have soared. "I don't see the looks that I used to get when I was big and fat," he said, remembering the days when "people would look at you and go, 'Oh my God,' and turn away in a hurry."

And he's trying things he once could only dream of attempting. Last year, he went skiing with Bicchieri at Gunstock. "I was doing things I hadn't done before, because I'd been afraid of breaking my skis," he said.

On the slopes, he said, "I felt like a teen -" He stopped himself, realizing that he weighs 45 pounds less than he did when he finished high school. "Actually, I feel like a preteen again."
