



# Science links obesity to fat, lazy microbes

**Ned Hickson**

device capable of measuring the weight of a single cell. This is big news because it moves us beyond the limits of sub-gram measurements "nano," "pico" and "femto," and into an exciting new realm of measurements known as

"zeppo," "harpo" and "groucho." This could eventually lead to the smallest and least-known unit of measure, "chico."

Many of you are probably wondering how useful this information really is when it seems most things — cars, houses, Americans in general — are actually getting bigger.

Personally, I see no benefit in being able to describe my weight as "a little over 70 trillion harpo-grams." Nor do I want to be around when my wife discovers, after eating that extra helping of potato salad this July Fourth, that she not only gained back the 17 trillion zeppo-grams she'd

lost, but also put on an extra two billion grouchos.

It doesn't matter that all of this adds up to less than a single uncooked lima bean. What matters is that I make the potato salad, and will therefore be held responsible.

As Cornell University scientists explained, this new system of measurement is a tremendous breakthrough because it allows them to weigh things that had previously been too small for anyone to actually care about.

To help you appreciate this advancement, I will attempt to explain the science behind the discovery. I should warn you that I will be referring to

"oscillating cantilevers" and "sextillions."

Rest assured that these are completely innocuous words, especially since I have no idea what they mean.

However, according to scientists, their discovery of sub-gram measurements was made by using "tiny oscillating cantilevers" to detect a change in the mass of something as small as one "sextillion."

This is equal to one-thousandth of a femtogram or, put in more practical terms, roughly the size of one bacterium nostril.

Why is this important?

Because, as far as I know, this is the first time anyone has actually used the term "bacterium nostril" in a newspaper column. But even more important, scientists will tell you that it's our dogged pursuit of knowledge that separates us from the apes (who, as we all

know, have really big nostrils.)

The bigger question, of course, is how this new ability to weigh microorganisms will affect you and me, the general nose-breathing public.

With our nation's obesity problem in mind, I am using this technology to launch my own weight-loss program.

Unlike other programs, mine strikes at the heart of our obesity issue by placing blame where it belongs: squarely on the shoulders of big fat microbes, which constantly hang all over us, therefore making us appear to weigh more than we actually do.

The "Nedkins Micro Diet" is actually in bookstores right now, so look for it on the shelves.

You'll have to look hard, though.

It's pretty small.

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