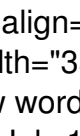
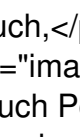


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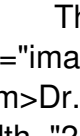
Very few words have a birthday so precise, and so precisely known, as couch potato. It was on July 15, 1976, we are told, that couch potato came into being, uttered by Tom Iacino of Pasadena, California, during a telephone conversation. He was a member of a Southern California group humorously opposing the fads of exercise and healthy diet in favor of vegetating before the TV and eating junk food (1973). Because their lives centered on television--the boob tube (1966)--they called themselves boob tubers. Iacino apparently took the brilliant next step and substituted potato as a synonym for tuber. Thinking of where that potato sits to watch the tube, he came up with couch potato.

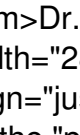
Or so the story goes, as told in the subsequent registration of Couch Potato as a trademark. In any case, when the new phrase reached the ears of Robert Armstrong, another member of the boob tubers, he drew a cartoon of a potato on a couch,

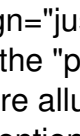


formed a club called the Couch Potatoes, registered the trademark and began merchandising Couch Potato paraphernalia, from T shirts to dolls. He published a newsletter called The Tuber's Voice:

The Couch Potato Newsletter







If the story ended there, couch potato would have been as passing a fad as the "pet rock" (1975) of the same vintage. But since the 1970s the tube has grown more alluring and the couch potato culture more compelling, especially with the 1980s invention of the zapper (1985), or remote control. No longer a cartoon character, the couch potato is now one of us."---<a

[Answers.com](http://www.answers.com/topic/couch-potato)

[Wordsmith Radio](http://wordsmithradio.org/scripts/couchpotato.html) adds this: "The term couch potato has been with us long enough now that a dictionary editors recognize it as a permanent member of our lexicon. A couch potato, according to the American Heritage College Dictionary, is "a person who spends much time sitting or lying down, usually watching television."

Taken with the name and the concept, the group of TV addicts got off the couch to appear in the 1979 "Doo-Dah Parade," a parody of the Tournament of Roses event held in Pasadena. Assembling themselves on a float carrying TVs and "ceremonial couches," the couch potatoes lounged passively, unashamedly watching television for the duration of the parade.

Encouraged by the Doo-Dah crowd's enthusiastic support, the couch potatoes trademarked their name, marketing bumper stickers, caps, and stuffed couch potato dolls, even publishing a newsletter called The Tuber's Voice: The Couch Potato's Newsletter.

And why the potato emblem for the couch lifestyle? Lumpy, heavy, and inert, the tuber lounges on its soft divan, training its many eyes on the television screen, for endless hours.

[Steve Krupp's Curio Shop](http://www.deniskitchen.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Product_Code=BP_KSP.92&Category_Code=) has more: "Most people use the term "couch potato" (for habitual TV-viewers) without awareness of its

origin. Cartoonist/musician Bob Armstrong invented the term.  Self portrait of cartoonist and Couch Potato entrepreneur Bob Armstrong

Armstrong co-founded the original Couch Potatoes as a fraternal organization of admitted TV-worshippers in his native Pasadena CA. He was also smart enough to trademark the term. So when ubiquitous TV Guide (with its enormous '70s circulation) trumpeted the odd fez-wearing Potatoes in a major article, and the wire services followed, "couch potato" became an instant part of the American language. And Bob, until pirates wore him down, made a nice little living licensing the trademark for Coleco dolls and other merchandise.

 Couch Potato doll by Coleco, circa 1980's, USA

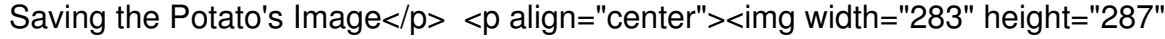
The Potatoes were an unabashedly all-male club but under spousal pressure formed an auxiliary club for women called the Couch Tomatoes (motto: "Equal Rights to the Couch.") Armstrong sold C.P. and Couch Tomato memberships which included nifty buttons, created under commission from Kitchen Sink.

  **Couch Potatoes** - The society for the prolonged viewing of television. The Couch Potatoes organization feels that "in a country where there are more homes with televisions than with indoor plumbing," it was time for television watchers to "come out of the closet and lie down and be counted." Their motto (emblazoned on official T-shirts worn while watching the tube) read: "Sic Semper Potatum Reclinus." Their official emblem (circular in shape) depicts a large spud reclining on a couch in front of a TV set. It was designed by underground cartoonist and illustrator, Bob Armstrong, one of the nine Couch Potato elders. The organization (now defunct) included both "Couch Potatoes" and "Tater Tots" (the younger members). The children were encouraged to watch as much TV as possible stressing historical programming like DAVY CROCKETT, YANCY DERRINGER and THE LIFE AND LEGEND OF WYATT EARP. Watching shows such as SESAME STREET or THE ELECTRIC COMPANY was a violation of one of their ten commandments: "Thou shalt not watch anything educational or British."
The group's unofficial membership is calculated to be in the millions. To join, individuals needed to state why they deserved to be a couch potato and list their five all-time favorite television shows. Their publications included Tubers Voice (written during commercials); Dr. Spudd's Etiquette For The Couch Potato (Pamphlet); The Official Couch Potato Handbook; and A Guide To Prolonged Viewing. The game show COUCH POTATOES/SYN/1989 hosted by Marc Summers teamed three players each to compete for \$5000 by answering TV trivia questions. TRIVIA NOTE: In the late 1980's in Massachusetts, another group came into existence called the Potato Anti-Defamation League. It was formed in response to the negative association with prolonged TV

viewing.

[Watch a Couch Potato Doll video ad from Coleco.](http://www.ifilm.com/ifilmdetail/2735098)

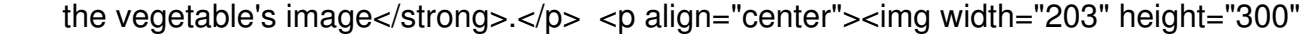
Back: Saving the Potato's Image



Potato Anti-Defamation League

A group in Massachusetts in the late 80's organized The Potato Anti-Defamation League as the potato's response to the negative association with prolonged tv viewing.

UK Farmers want "couch potato" removed from the dictionary because they believe the expression is damaging the vegetable's image.



A campaign promoting the use instead of "couch slouch" is being led by the British Potato Council, representing 4,000 growers and processors. The council argues that potatoes are "inherently healthy". Protests are due on Monday outside dictionary publisher Oxford University Press and in Parliament Square, London. "We are trying to get rid of the image that potatoes are bad for you," said council head of marketing Kathryn Race. "Of course it is not the Oxford English Dictionary's fault but we want to use another term than 'couch potato' because potatoes are inherently healthy." The campaign is backed by dieticians who say the vegetable is low in fat and high in vitamin C, the council says.

[Read the full BBC report here](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4108964.stm).

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