

Weight Loss Supplements: Fact or Fiction?

"Cures" Are Often More Hype than Help

-- By Becky Hand, Licensed & Registered Dietitian

Whether browsing the Internet, surfing through 500 channels, or flipping through your favorite magazine (or tabloid), you'll find them everywhere: weight loss supplements that offer quick and easy solutions to shedding unwanted pounds. Simply pop a pill, put on a patch, or tone up with the touch of a cream. Do these "cures" work, or are they more hype than help? Let's take a look at some of the most popular weight loss products, their claims, their risks...and why they're NOT such a great idea.

Weight Loss Supplements

- **Bitter Orange, Citrus Aurantium, and Sour Orange:**

These products are concentrated extracts from the orange peel. They are often used in "ephedra-free" products, claiming that they increase metabolism, but tests involving people haven't even been conducted! They contain the stimulant synephrine, which can cause hypertension and cardiovascular toxicity. Orange supplements can also interact with medication. Their risks are even greater when used with other stimulant-containing ingredients such as caffeine and decongestants. Individuals with heart disease, hypertension, and glaucoma should avoid these at all costs.

- **Chromium** (Examples: *Puritan's Pride Chromium Picolinate, Vitamin World Naturally Inspired Yeast Free Chromium Picolinate, Nutrilite Trim Advantage*):

Claims that chromium increases weight loss and improves body composition have only been backed by one study, while all other studies failed to find any supporting evidence. There are two types of chromium: Trivalent (which the body requires and is considered safe in doses of 200 micrograms or less daily) and Hexavalent (which may cause stomach upsets, ulcers, convulsions, kidney and liver diseases, and death). Hexavalent chromium can be toxic and shouldn't be used in supplements, but some do contain this dangerous form!

- **Conjugated Linoleic Acid (CLA)** (Examples: *Vitamin World CLA, Nature Made CLA, Now Foods CLA*):

This product claims to promote leanness, but very few studies support this claim. While more research is needed, CLA is generally safe.

- **Ephedra/Ephedrine:**

Ephedra may aid weight loss by suppressing appetite, and research has proven its effectiveness when used with caffeine. However, ephedra causes high blood pressure, stroke, and serious heart problems, which is why the sale of dietary supplements containing ephedra was prohibited in April 2004.

- **7-Keto Dehydroepiandrosterone (7-keto DHEA):**

Preliminary research indicates that this product may decrease body weight and fat composition by increasing metabolism, but larger research studies are needed (see Ephedra to learn why testing is important).

- **Hydroxycitric Acid (HCA) and Garcinia Cambogia:**

These products claim to suppress appetite and improve fat metabolism. While studies have shown mixed results, they are generally safe.

- **L-Carnitine:**

L-Carnitine claims to inhibit obesity, but there is very little evidence of its effectiveness.

- **Dihydroxyacetone (DHA), Pyruvate, and Dihydroxyacetone and Pyruvate (DHAP):**

A few small studies suggest that these supplements may have modest effects on weight loss, but research is needed. Presently, no serious side effects have been reported.

Fat Blockers

- **Alli:** For a detailed discussion of Alli, the first FDA approved weight loss pill available over the counter, [click here](#).
- **Lecithin, Guar Gum, Psyllium Hulls, Chickweed, and Chitosan** (Examples: *Chito-Trim, Exercise in a Bottle, Fat Blocker—Chitosan Complex, Fat Grabbers, Fat Trapper, Fat Trapper Plus, Metabo Fat Blocker, MiracleTab, Now Chitosan with Chromium*):
These products claim to help break down fat so that it can be absorbed, emulsified, trapped, and eliminated by the body. There is currently no competent and reliable scientific research to support such claims.

Starch Blockers

- **White Bean Extract, White Kidney Bean Extract, Green Tea Extract, Chlorogenic Acid from Coffee, Banaba Extract, Phaseolus Vulgaris, Natural Bean Extract** (Examples: *Carb Blocker Triple Action, CarboGetic, Carbo Grabbers, Carb Shuttle, CarboVal, Extreme Carb Blocker, Maximum Strength Phase 2 Carb Blocker, Now Phase 2 Carb Blocker, Starch Blocker Plus, UltraCarb, Xenadrine CarboCurb*):
These products claim to prevent the digestion and neutralization of sugar and carbohydrates, therefore reducing the calories available to the body. The undigested carbohydrates are carried to the intestine for elimination. These claims lack scientific research and are false and misleading.

Stress, Craving, and Appetite Controllers

- **Hoodia Gordonii:** For years the South African San bush people have used the succulent plant, Hoodia gordonii, to stave off hunger during long hunts. A few preliminary and *unpublished* research studies indicate that there may be some type of appetite-suppressing mechanism from a molecule in Hoodia called P57. This molecule supposedly affects the hypothalamus of the brain to reduce appetite. Now this plant from the Kalahari Desert is being imported and made into Hoodia pills, tablets and capsules to supposedly help with hunger control for those trying to lose weight. However, there is no conclusive evidence to support these claims regarding appetite control and weight loss. For now, more evidence is needed to determine if Hoodia is effective for any clinical condition. Beyond that, there is plenty of fake Hoodia on the market. News reports suggest that some Hoodia products don't even contain any actual Hoodia.
- **Magnolia Bark, Korean Ginseng, Chromium Picolinate, and Chitosan** (Examples: *CarboGetic, CarboVal, Maximum Strength Phase 2 Carb Blocker, Miracle Tab, Now Chitosan with Chromium*):
These ingredients claim to suppress appetite, reduce stress-induced cravings, and normalize cravings overall. No competent and reliable scientific evidence exists to support these claims.
- **Cortisol Control** (Examples: *CortiSlim, CortiStress, Cortisol Stress Test*):
Cortisol is also called the "stress hormone." These claims suggest that a persistently elevated cortisol level is the underlying cause of weight gain and weight retention. The supplements further claim to eliminate cravings for certain foods (including sweets and carbohydrates), control appetite, ease eating due to stress, burn calories efficiently, and therefore result in weight loss. While cortisol levels can be a factor, these "control" claims are not supported by documented scientific research. They are considered false, misleading, and deceptive.

Body Composition Regulators

- **Chromium Picolinate and Garcinia Cambogia** (Example: *Turbo Tone*):
These claim to significantly improve body composition and fat loss, particularly in individuals who may not be as aggressive in making lifestyle changes. These claims lack scientific substantiation, making them false and misleading.

Caffeine Boosters

- **Mate, Yerba Mate, Jesuit's Tea, Paraguay Tea, Black Tea, Cocoa, Coffee, Cola Nut, Green Tea, Guarana** (Examples: *Metabolife, Stacker Two*):
The caffeine contained in these products is a stimulant, which raises blood pressure and has diuretic effects. Chronic use of caffeine can produce tolerance and psychological dependency as well. Caffeine was often combined with ephedra (which was removed from the market in the U.S.) for weight loss.

Topical Fat Loss Gel and Cream Ingredients

- **Leptoprin and Anorex** (Examples: *Cutting Gel, Dermalin, Tummy Flattening Gel*):
These products claim to promote a rapid and visible fat loss on the areas of the body where they are applied. These are false, unsubstantiated claims, without any scientific research.

Weight loss "cures" come and go. Information on weight loss products is available from many different sources, including the organizations below. Before wasting your money, find out if the claims are fact or phony.

Information in the article was obtained from the [Federal Trade Commission](#) (1-877-FTC-HELP), [US Pharmacopeia](#) (1-800-822-8772), and [Consumerlab.com](#) (1-914-722-9149).