

Courtesy of



Dietary Supplements for Weight Loss...

...What You Need to Know

With little oversight over dietary supplements or evidence that they work, it is important not to believe the advertising claims.

Dietary supplements promise incredible weight loss, but medical studies show most do not work, and some may be harmful. Despite this medical evidence, Americans spend over \$2 billion a year on weight loss supplements.

Problems with Dietary Supplements

Unlike FDA-approved medications, dietary supplements do not have to be proven to be effective or safe before being advertised or sold. They are not rigorously regulated by the FDA or state boards of pharmacy.

- Some people believe products are safe if they are advertised as “natural” and do not require prescriptions.
- There is little evidence that any herbal or over-the-counter weight loss aid helps with significant weight loss.
- Although advertisers claim that studies support their products, the studies are almost always unscientific and poorly done. They do not prove the product is effective or safe.

What are the Risks of Taking Dietary Supplements?

Some dietary supplements may cause heart problems, liver or kidney problems, or even death. The FDA warns against several products that contain toxins or banned drugs. An example of lack of safety is HCG shots which are advertised as “natural.” They are sold inappropriately as part of miracle weight loss diets.

- HCG is a hormone produced during pregnancy.
- The FDA approved the shots to treat some cases of infertility. However, it required a label stating HCG has not been proven to help with weight loss.
- Still, HCG shots are used with extreme calorie limits of 500 calories a day. Studies have shown this does not work for weight loss and is likely unsafe.



Safe Over-the-Counter Dietary Supplements

There are two over-the-counter options for losing weight that have been proven effective with scientific studies.

The first is Alli®. It is not a dietary supplement. Alli is an over-the-counter version of orlistat (a prescription medication approved by the FDA in 1999).

- Several studies show that orlistat can help people lose a reasonable amount of weight and keep it off long term.
- One study showed that orlistat (at the full prescription dose, which is twice the dose of over-the-counter Alli) led to 10% body weight loss over 1 year when used with a behavioral weight loss program.
- The people in this study maintained their weight loss after 4 years. They were also 45% less likely to develop diabetes than people who did not take it.

The second is fiber supplements.

- Fiber supplements help make you feel full and slow digestion.
- The most commonly used fiber supplement is psyllium. It leads to small weight losses and may also lower cholesterol.
- At recommended levels, the risk of side effects is low.
- Or increase fiber in your diet and get the same benefits.



Tell your healthcare providers about all the supplements you are taking.

Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if a medicine or supplement is safe for you to take and if it will help you lose weight.

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