

**2015 01.27 Health Matters**  
**Diet Pills**

This is Health Matters, with a report on diet pills.

Diet pills promise a lot. The question is: do they deliver? And there's another question, more urgent perhaps; are they safe? According to Consumer Reports and John Hopkins Medical Center, over the counter diet pills carry risks, even plant-based diet pills can have side effects that can be serious.

Americans spend billions of dollars a year looking for a magic weight loss pill. They buy natural herbal supplements. They buy over-the-counter or prescription pharmaceutical preparations. Most try these pills with little success, yet new options with more promises keep appearing in the market place. From a recent survey of 3,000 adults, Consumer Reports concluded that 1 in 4 American has used weight loss supplements. About 28% of those surveyed thought the natural supplements worked better than other weight-loss methods, but half of these users also reported at least one side effect. The common side effects included a faster heart rate, jitters, digestive problems or dry mouth.

Weight loss experts at John Hopkins Medical Center recently evaluated the five most popular natural weight loss supplements. The first, bitter orange, simulates the central nervous system and slows down gastric motility; actions that increase the sense of being full and lower food intake, but the stimulating effects of Bitter Orange are similar to ephedra, a plant that is now strictly controlled by the FDA because of negative side effects. Bitter orange may have similar adverse reactions.

Studies of green tea as a weight loss aid, either as a tea or a capsule, have produced mixed results. Generally, the weight loss is small at best, but green tea has proven helpful in keeping weight down once you've lost the excess. Only people sensitive to caffeine have negative reactions to green tea.

No significant weight loss impact was found in the three other natural substance supplements studied by John Hopkins; conjugated linoleic acids, hoodia and Lcarnitine, although L-Carnitine is still being studied for possible weight-loss benefits.

The FDA does not require manufacturers to prove natural supplements are safe and effective, thus producers are free to promote and sell them as if they were. According to Harvard Medical School physicians, there are no natural ingredients that lead directly to weight loss. They are neither safe nor effective. Worse, some products labeled as natural actually contain untested drugs not identified on the label.

The FDA has recalled hundreds of weight-loss supplements that contained drugs. 'Lose Quickly' for example contained a drug that is supposed to be sold by prescription only. In 2013, the weight loss supplement OxyElite Pro was linked to 97 cases of severe hepatitis and liver failure, including one death. A stimulant drug found in OxyTherm Pro and MD2 Meltdown Pro had never been studied. The FDA barred the drug's use after finding that it can lead to elevated blood pressure and cardiovascular problems. Heart attack, stroke and cancer are other risks associated with illegal stimulants found in mislabeled natural supplements.

Yohimbe, an extract from tree bark for example, can cause elevated blood pressure and panic attacks. . Clearly, the word natural on a label is no guarantee that the product is safe to use. We tend to believe that if an over-the-counter product is natural it is safer than prescription medication. This is simply not true. The label natural has become a marketing ploy.

Prescription diet pills have a checkered history as well. Between 1997 and 2010, three weight-loss prescription drugs were taken off the market because of dangerous side effects: Fen-Phen, Acomplia, and Meridia. Doctors are now more cautious about prescribing weight loss drugs. They do so only for people with a body mass index of 30 or greater, or for people with a body mass index of 27 who have a weight-related health condition.

The Consumer Reports study of weight loss pills concludes that losing weight is actually quite simple.

1. Set yourself a reasonable goal.
2. Maintain portion control and count your calories.
3. Cook and eat at home.
4. Eat more fruit, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and seafoods.
5. Reduce your sugar intake to 10 percent or less of your total daily calories.

**Sources and Links**

***The Trouble with Diet Pills, from onHealth, Volume 27 Number 1, by Consumer Reports.***

***Weight Loss Supplements: What You Should Know, from Health After 50, Johns Hopkins Medicine, Special Winter 2014-2015 Issue, Volume 26 Issue 14.***

**<http://ConsumerReports.org>**

**<http://JohnsHopkinsHealthAlerts.com>**