

OTC Weight-Loss Products:

Do They Deliver?

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The public has been deluged for years by claims of fantastic results with weight-loss aids. This is one of the more lucrative areas for Internet operations and tabloid journalism, where the cycle of falling prey to the “next best thing” is rampant. Patience is also at a premium. Although it may have taken years to gain weight, few seem to take the slow, methodical steps required to lose it.

Nasal decongestants

Some over-the-counter (OTC) agents garnering attention have been phenylpropanolamine (PPA) and ephedra. Both are nasal decongestants and distant cousins to the amphetamine family. Neither was ever officially indicated for weight loss in Canada and that remains the case today. PPA was also recently removed from the market (as a decongestant) due to concerns over hemorrhagic stroke, while ephedra can be found in some non-pharmacy outlets. Ephedra's safety has also been under scrutiny and this culminated in the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Mary's case

Mary, 42, is a regular patient who has hypertension and often complains of joint pain. She is about 40 lbs overweight. She has tried a multitude of tabloid diets over the past 15 years, the most recent being a low-carbohydrate type.

She asks if there is anything she can buy in a pharmacy that might help shed some pounds.

For the answer to Mary's question, go to page 87.



banning its sale as of late December 2003. Trials showed that people using ephedra lost weight at a rate of 0.6 kg per month more than the placebo group.¹ Average weight loss at four months has been 11%, with only high doses (defined as 100 mg/day to 150 mg/day) producing statistically significant results. To put these dosages in perspective, Health Canada allows

Table 1

Popular agents found in health food stores

Agent	Mechanism and efficacy
Hydroxycitric acid (Garcinia cambogia)	It is thought to inhibit lipogenesis. It has reduced energy intake in patients, but a randomized, controlled trial failed to show significant weight loss.
Chitosan	It is a water-soluble extract from the shells of crustaceans that is chemically similar to cellulose. It is purported to bind to lipids in the gut (chitosan is positively-charged while fats are negative), thereby decreasing their absorption. While weight loss has been reported, actual excretion of fat from the body has been questioned.
Apple cider vinegar	Of dubious value.

calories than the meal(s) the user is asked to replace. Each 325 mL can has 240 kcal, contains a mix of proteins/carbohydrates/fats, and an array of vitamins and minerals. With this system, a person running a daily deficit of 500 kcal (compared to normal intake) for a

32 mg per day as a decongestant.* When caffeine is added (also an unapproved use in

week can potentially shed one pound. Package material also recommends exercise and caloric

With meal replacements, such as Slim Fast[®], a person running a daily deficit of 500 kcal for a week can potentially shed one pound.

restrictions. The question with the meal replacement approach may be suboptimal nutritional balance and its sustainability over time. However, long-term results have been seen in structured programs^{2,3} and

Canada), the rate of weight loss jumps to 1 kg per month, and again, an average loss of 11% has been attained at four months.

assistance from a health-care professional has helped.^{4,5}

Meal replacements

Meal replacements (e.g., Slim Fast[®]) are milkshake-like liquids that are designed to have less

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Benzocaine

Dexatrim[®] and Appedrine[®] are tablets containing seven vitamins and minerals, as well as benzocaine to numb the tongue and/or stomach. As the main active ingredient, benzocaine (even at much higher doses) has minimal impact on weight loss.⁶

A followup on Mary

To answer Mary's question, while commercial meal replacements might hold some promise, the local pharmacy can offer very little by way of effective non-prescription options.

Dozens of other agents are found in health food stores. Table 1 lists three of the more popular ones. [Dx](#)

**At the time of writing, the Health Canada Web site had not responded to this American action.*

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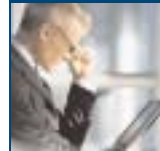
Diet Reviews and Information:
www.chasefreedom.com



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