

THINGS TO

KNOW ABOUT



DIET PILLS

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It is tempting — particularly if you have a weakness for delectable Caribbean food, which (let's face it), isn't always the most balanced in terms of nutrition. We like flavour, we like variety — and so, inevitably, if we're not mindful of it and active in our daily lives, the pounds creep up on us...

It is often said that diets “don’t work”, which, to some extent, is true — a “diet” as it is generally understood, is a temporary solution to an immediate problem. Some are able to integrate it into an entire lifestyle change that they can maintain, but many fall “off the wagon” shortly after they hit their goal — or even before!

And then, you run into an old friend who’s lost significant weight, and she tells you her secret; or a guy at the gym flexes a bicep and mentions the success he’s been having with a supplement that obliterates stubborn fat. Or, perhaps the label leaps out at you directly while you are buying medication at a pharmacy....

The diet pill: a quick fix, the answer you’ve been looking for, the solution to your problem. But before you jump to conclusions, here are a few things you should know about diet pills.

WHO USES DIET PILLS?

Firstly, let’s debunk the myth of the imagined ‘pill-popper’. Some think is the lure of laziness that leads the gullible to try just about every diet pill on the market, but this judgment is a bit harsh. Pills can be a last resort for those who have had little success with ample amounts of exercise, or perhaps extensive exercise is not an option for some.

Medical conditions can also affect one’s ability to lose weight. Some of these conditions include polycystic ovarian syndrome, thyroid disorders, diabetes or induced weight gain as a result of necessary medications (e.g. steroids for asthma).

Doctors may also recommend the use of diet pills for those who are obese and need to ‘kick-start’ their

metabolism and begin losing weight before they further endanger their health.

Another common misconception in the Caribbean is that only women use diet pills. In fact, they are used by men and women alike — as the gender-specific products on the market will indicate.

Finally, diet pills are also not just for “fat people”; athletes often use such supplements as part of their fitness regimen, and implement them successfully to achieve peak performance.

SO... DO THEY WORK?

In a word, yes.

Some work quickly, some take a bit longer for the user to respond, some result in more or less effects than another... but at the end of the day, most will work to some extent. It is unlikely that a product would have made it on the market if there was absolutely no evidence indicating that some benefits are to be derived from its use.

That said, while they do work to achieve a desired result, that does not mean that they are safe to use. The majority of ads you see in the media are for products that are unregulated, untested and unproven. How often do we hear of a pill that has been pulled off the market?

Not all dietary supplements are regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA); in actuality, it is the burden of the FDA to prove that a supplement is unsafe for consumption. Even the ones that are FDA-approved have a long list of potential side effects. Essentially, diet pills fall into that grey area of ‘use at your own risk’.

Diet pills usually work through one or more of the following ways:

- Blocking your body from absorbing a percentage of the fat in the food that you eat. By inhibiting an enzyme called lipase in your body, fat is removed in bowel movements instead of being broken down and absorbed.

- Suppressing your appetite by affecting chemicals of serotonin and norepinephrine in your brain (products with ingredients such as sibutramine, diethylpropion, phentermine)

- Boosting your energy (products with ingredients such as caffeine and ephedra can induce thermogenesis, causing you to feel more energised and sweat more)

PROS AND CONS OF USE

While they will target your body through one of these ways, their use can also result in some of the following side effects:

- Abdominal cramping
- Fatigue
- Passing gas
- Dry mouth
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Headache
- Insomnia
- Dizziness

Some of these side effects are temporary and tolerable to the average person, but there are many more serious effects such as heart conditions, and liver and intestinal damage. The truth is that once you take diet pills, you are at risk of experiencing some side effect. Even if you are fortunate enough to have no side effects, the potential for disaster can come after you see success.....

Do you keep using it? If you taper off, would you regain the weight?

CAN YOU GET THE SAME RESULT WITHOUT THEM?

Yes. In most instances, they are not necessary. Let's think for a minute about two scenarios with two "normal" adults.

Jack and Janet both work out three to four times a week, hitting it hard with cardiovascular and weight training. Both eat what he/she considers to be healthy and in line with weight loss goals, but each still has a 30-40% fat percentage.

Janet visits a nutritionist and hires a personal trainer, analyses her diet and comes up with a solution for a plausible workout regimen and diet plan. Over a six-month period of trouble-shooting and adjusting to suit, she starts to lose fat and gain muscle.

Jack sees his friend Janet having success, but thinks six months is far too long to wait. He decides to opt for diet pill X. In three weeks, Jack is "jacked" on the pills, dropping weight quickly, and he is thrilled that it is working — best purchase ever!

His energy level is through the roof, he is pumping it harder and harder at the gym, the ladies are giving him appreciative glances, and the gym owner even invites him to enter a Mr. Physique competition. Thanks to the pills, Jack's life is great.

Six months later, Jack is still using the diet pill "as recommended on the bottle"... except, now Jack is experiencing slight chest pains, and he sweats after barely doing any activity. At first he thinks, "It can't be the pills... I've been using them so long without any issues"; then he realizes, "Well, it must be the pills... but I don't want to put back on the weight..."; then he thinks, "Well I probably should stop before my health gets worse, but let me just get to X point first, and then I'll stop..."

Unlike other drugs that induce chemical dependencies, addiction to seemingly innocent 'over-the-counter' diet pills can result from a mental dependency. Although we may know better, and may think we are immune and 'smarter' than the woman or man in the classic urban legend of 'killed by a diet pill'... we are also human.



Since diet pills are not regulated, their ingredients are not subject to scrutiny. The side effects of these pills can range from mild to life threatening. Know what you are getting into before you use them.

IF YOU MUST... USE WITH CARE

If you do decide to try a diet pill or supplement, please read and do your research, and most importantly, take your time. Here are a few tips:

1. *Take it whole with a full glass of water. Never crush diet pills to mix in drinks or soups. Unless you are specifically told to chew them, do not chew them; they are designed to be taken whole. Crushing them might make them more powerful than they should be, making them lethal.*
2. *Diet pills cause a person to urinate more frequently due to its diuretic effect. This could lead to dehydration, thus, causing complications. As a precaution, it is best to drink eight glasses of water every day while on diet pills.*
3. *Take only the recommended dosage. Taking more than required will not help you lose weight, but will definitely increase the risk of side effects.*
4. *Monitor your heart rate. Heartbeat should be less than 86 beats per minute. Stop taking the pills if it reaches 90 or higher, and inform your doctor or dietitian immediately.*
5. *If recommended by a professional, always follow the instructions set by the dietitian and/or doctor — do not only rely on what's enclosed in the box. Also diet pills will only work as expected if a diet plan is being followed.*
6. *After three months, stop taking the diet pills. This will mitigate against some side effects like addiction. Other diet pills like phenylpropanolamine are safe to use only up to sixteen weeks. Some studies show that it can cause health problems if taken under one month.*

FINALLY, REMEMBER...

It is entirely possible to get everything you want in terms of health and fitness without venturing down that uncertain path of the diet pill.

If you get there without the assistance of a pill, it is more likely that you will stay there — and your goals achieved will be all the more real and sustainable for your long-term health and wellness. 