

# Fact or Fiction

## The Truth about Common Weight Loss Supplements

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Many people feel the pressures to be skinny. In the year 2000 it was estimated that about one-third of adults were obese. This need to be thinner pushes some people into trying new methods of weight loss. Many of those people are turning to supplements with almost \$1.3 billion spent on weight loss supplements in 2001 (1). Supplements are believed to be safe because they are all natural, but do we really know what we are getting out of that supplement bottle. We will review several weight loss supplements and get the real “skinny” on them.

### **Ephedra**

Ephedra has been off the market since 2004; however, ephedra can still be found and is commonly used to aid in weight loss. Early studies showed that there was some short-term weight loss, but showed no proof of long-term weight loss or increasing athletic stamina (2). Safety of ephedra has been a big question. Studies show that the odds of psychiatric, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal symptoms can increase 3-fold or more. Some of the most commonly seen adverse effects of ephedra use are hypertension, heart attack, stroke and even death. Many of these side effects are seen in healthy individuals that are taking the recommended dosages (1). Because of these adverse effects the FDA banned the sale of ephedra in April of 2004 saying that its use was unsafe for the consumer (3).

### **Chromium**

Chromium is an essential trace mineral and is believed to play a role in carbohydrate, protein, and lipid metabolism. A study using chromium supplementation in overweight

individuals reported seeing some weight loss compared to the placebo group (less than ½ pound per week). If you consider that if a person can decrease their calories by 500 calories a day (which equals about two 20 oz. Sweetened carbonated beverages) you can lose about one pound per week. So even though slight weight loss was seen in overweight individuals the study was not clinically meaningful (4). No significant side effects were seen in short-term chromium use; however, there is some concern that chromium could generate free-radical damage. Few studies have been conducted on chromium use for weight loss so the efficacy and safety of long-term use still remains uncertain (1).

### **Guar Gum**

Guar gum is a soluble fiber that was believed to increase satiety; however, it showed no effects on weight loss compared to the placebo. Although there is no known benefit to taking guar gum it shows little adverse effects. Guar gum is a relatively safe supplement, but the only thing you will lose is cash (4).

### **References**

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