

Weight Loss: ***Will the Real Fat Burners Please Stand Up***

You can't read a magazine, watch television, or listen to the radio these days without being bombarded by the latest entry into the multi-billion dollar American weight loss industry: Fat burners. While the jury is still pretty much out when it comes to the effectiveness and safety of over-the-counter products that tout themselves as 'miracle' fat burners, every responsible professional working in the field of nutrition, weight control, and weight loss agrees that the use of any supplemental dietary fat burner must be part of an overall weight loss and weight control regimen that includes a well balanced diet, regular, healthful exercise, rest, and effective stress management.

Understanding Fat and What Fat Burners Do

There's no getting around it: Your body needs fat. This is true because the purpose of fat is to store calories that can be converted to energy, and energy is what sustains your life. So even the leanest body needs some amount of fat to survive.

No doubt, you have heard of the different categories of fat. These categories are identified according to

a complex calculation of their different molecular compositions, and include fatty acids (including omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids), saturated fat, unsaturated fat, polyunsaturated fat, monounsaturated fat, trans fatty acids, and partially hydrogenated fat.

Your body is naturally able to manufacture most of the fatty acids necessary for the storage and conversion of calories into energy. But some fatty acids necessary for optimal health must come from the foods you eat. These are called essential fatty acids, which are generally found in animal fats, and include the groupings omega-3 and omega-6 fats.

Saturated fats, which are solid at room temperature, are fats in which the molecules are saturated with hydrogen. Today, we believe that saturated fats, including trans fatty acids, are dangerous because they build up in and clog the arteries. Conversely, unsaturated, mono-unsaturated, and polyunsaturated fats, which are liquid at room temperature (and are better known as oils), are considered the 'good fats' because they are actually helpful in lowering the body's 'bad' cholesterol.

The process of 'burning' fat in the body to convert it into energy is called thermogenesis. While virtually all foods elevate the body's temperature to a certain degree, thus prompting thermogenesis, some foods, such as caffeine and refined carbohydrates, produce more heat than others, such as complex starches, for example.

Supplemental fat burners such as those sold over-the-counter today typically attack stored body fat in

three ways: They assist the body in breaking down existing fat more easily; they boost the body's system of metabolizing fats, proteins, and carbohydrates more efficiently; and they contain diuretics that help to rid the body of excess water contained in the muscles, thus relieving the feeling of bloatedness and increasing a feeling of overall lightness.

While the benefits claimed by fat burning supplements would appear to be desirable for the estimated one in every four adult Americans who are considered overweight, I would be remiss if I did not point out some caveats about these products.

First of all, few, if any, of the over-the-counter fat burners available today are approved by the Food and Drug Administration. No doubt you will recall the recent problems surrounding such products as Phen/Fen and Redux, both of which were advertised as breakthroughs in the weight loss industry but also resulted in such side effects as heart valve problems, lung disease, brain damage, and in a very few isolated and extreme cases, death.

Fat burners are generally considered safe if taken in the recommended dosages and under the supervision of a professional healthcare provider. They work best when combined with a more alkaline, enzymatically active diet that provides sufficient protein, and a regimen that includes exercise, attention to the nervous system, and a positive mental attitude.

Ellen's Guide to Fat Burning Supplements and Weight Loss Herbs

The following dietary supplements will boost your body's metabolism and contribute to the process of thermogenesis or fat burning.

Chromium Picolinate

The trace mineral chromium picolinate helps the body to better utilize carbohydrates by regulating insulin and balancing blood sugars. It helps to improve the absorption of glucose into the cells, thus making it more useful for energy, and also helps to lower blood lipid levels and to raise HDL (the 'good' cholesterol) in the body.

Although chromium picolinate has suffered some bad press of late, my opinion is that anything taken in excess can cause problems. Yes, laboratory rats that were given 6,000 times the recommended dosage of chromium picolinate suffered from the dosage. But who wouldn't? As far as I'm concerned, 200 mcg. of chromium picolinate taken on a daily basis to boost metabolism is perfectly safe and effective.

Garcinia Cambogia

The hydroxy citric acid (HCA) found in the rind of the south Asian fruit garcinia cambogia helps to

inhibit the production of fat from ingested carbohydrates, helps the body to burn stored fat, and controls the appetite by inducing a feeling of fullness. Two to three grams, or 2,000 to 3,000 mg. of garcinia cambogia, taken in divided doses before meals, is a highly effective weight loss supplement.

L-Carnitine

This amino acid found in red meat and some poultry helps to transport fatty acids across the membrane of the cell into the mitochondria, where it is burned as fuel for energy. It also helps to increase the rate at which fats in the liver are oxidized. Because of these properties, L-Carnitine can help relieve fatigue and keep the cardiovascular system functioning properly.

My advice is to begin with 250 mg. per day, taken on an empty stomach for the first week, and then to increase the dosage by 250 mg. each week until you reach 1,000 mg. And by the way, if you start to notice that your sweat smells different once you start taking L-Carnitine, not to worry. This is the odor of your body releasing the wastes that accompany burning fat.

L-Tyrosine

L-Tyrosine is an amino acid that helps the thyroid to function more efficiently. This is important during weight loss because a properly functioning thyroid system boosts the body's metabolism of nutrients.

Methionine

The amino acid methionine is also classified as a lipotropic, which helps to prevent the accumulation of fat in the liver and to detoxify the waste by-products of protein synthesis. Taken in combination with other fat burning supplements, methionine produces very favorable results.

Vanadyl Sulfate

Like chromium picolinate, vanadyl sulfate is a trace mineral that helps to increase stored glucose, thereby sparing lean tissue during dieting, lessening fatigue, and reducing the breakdown of muscle protein for energy. Vanadyl sulfate also helps to inhibit the storage of carbohydrates as fat by balancing blood sugar levels.

In addition to the fat burning supplements above, adding the following herbs to your diet will also help with a weight loss program:

Buchu

This herb acts as a natural diuretic and urinary antiseptic.

Dandelion

Another effective diuretic.

Evening Primrose

This herb helps to control cholesterol.

Gymnema Sylvestre

This herb has the ability to suppress your ability to taste sugar, making sweets less attractive to the palate.

Hawthorn Fruit

This herb reduces cholesterol and blood lipids (fats).

Ho Shou Wu (Fo Ti)

This herb has been reported effective in lowering cholesterol.

Ginseng

Perhaps the best known of all herbs, ginseng stimulates the body's energy and metabolism.

Psyllium

Psyllium is a grain grown in India that is used for its fiber content. It is one of the most popular fibers used for cleansing the intestinal wall and softening the stool.

Sargassum

The seaweed sargassum stimulates the thyroid, thereby reducing the accumulation of cellulite.

If, like many Americans, you wish to lose weight in order to be more healthy and look better, you will find the fat burning supplements and weight loss herbs listed above to be helpful in your efforts. But while achieving and maintaining the ideal weight is the ultimate goal of every dieter, it's important to embark on any weight loss program armed with the knowledge that doing so is safe and that it will result in the long-lasting effects you seek.

Therefore, my best advice is to consult with your healthcare provider before starting any diet. Look to lose a slow and steady amount of weight on a weekly basis (one to two pounds is generally considered wisest), and above all, create for yourself a weight loss plan that includes a well-balanced diet and plenty of exercise and rest.

If you plan to lose weight, you might as well plan smart from the start so that you not only lose a certain number of pounds, but you also change your entire way of eating so that you can maintain your target weight once you get there.

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