

As we begin 2019 in ministry with each other, the Parish Health Team wishes for you these words from 3 John 1:2 – “Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.”

Is Weight Loss on Your List of New Year's Resolutions?

We all know that eating fewer calories and exercising more is the key to losing weight; yet we still look for that magic bullet, a simple pill, that will offer quick and easy results.

This time of year, we are bombarded with ads for products claiming to be that magic bullet. Beware! The FDA has found hundreds of products claiming to be “natural” or a “dietary supplement” for weight loss that actually contain hidden ingredients from prescription drugs, drugs that have been removed from the market because they were unsafe, or ingredients that have not been adequately studied in humans. Some of these are listed below:

- Furosemide (potent diuretic/water pill)
- Fluoxetine (antidepressant also known as Prozac)
- Sibutramine (weight loss drug removed from the market in 2010 due to heart problems and strokes)
- Phenolphthalein (laxative commonly used in OTC products prior to 1999 when FDA reclassified it due to potential cancer risk and it was removed from all products)
- Phenytoin (seizure medication)

More of these tainted products are finding their way into the U.S. marketplace through online sales, social and print media promotions, and some can be found on store shelves. Products labeled as dietary supplements do not require FDA approval. It is the manufacturer's responsibility to ensure its products are safe and that product labeling is truthful and not misleading. However, the FDA finds it difficult to enforce this due to the vast number of products. Since these ingredients are usually not identified on the label, it is found only when safety issues are suspected and reported. The FDA must then investigate, identify actual ingredients, and take appropriate actions.

HCG is another product that has been marketed for weight loss in conjunction with a very low-calorie diet. HCG is a hormone produced during pregnancy and FDA approved for the treatment of female infertility, and other medical conditions. It is not approved for weight loss and the manufacturer states there is no evidence that the drug causes weight loss. It is illegal to sell HCG, in any amount, over the counter and the FDA continues to take action against companies engaging in this practice.

There are FDA approved prescription drugs to help people with long-term weight management. These drugs are intended for people greater than 18 years of age who:

- Have a BMI (body mass index) ≥ 30 , or
- Have a BMI ≥ 27 and at least one weight-related health problem.

These drugs work by decreasing appetite, stimulating metabolism, or reducing absorption of fat from the diet and are recommended for use with a weight-loss diet and exercise. Unfortunately, results are usually not quick or dramatic. In studies, women lost 5-10% of initial body weight over the course of a year. However, even this amount can be helpful in treating some medical conditions. In general, people with a history of heart attack, stroke, irregular heartbeat, or overactive thyroid should not take weight-loss medications. There is also a potential for adverse effects when taken with other medications.

It is always best to consult with your healthcare providers (and a registered dietitian) to develop a plan that is best for you and heed the following tips from the FDA when considering any dietary supplement:

- Do the claims sound too good to be true, or seem exaggerated or unrealistic?
- Watch out for claims such as “guaranteed results,” “totally safe,” or “scientific breakthrough.”
- Be skeptical about anecdotal information from personal “testimonials” with incredible benefits.
- A product marketed as herbal alternative to an FDA-approved drug or having effects similar to prescription drugs may be tainted!

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—TIM WARD