

First of Its Kind National Survey Finds Misinformed Consumers Rely on Unproven Weight Loss Products

More than Half (54 percent) Incorrectly Believe these Products are FDA Approved

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BOSTON and STORRS, Conn., Oct 22, 2006 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- A new, landmark survey released by the University of Connecticut's Center for Survey Research & Analysis (CSRA) and presented today at the 2006 Annual Scientific Meeting of NAASO, The Obesity Society, found that many adults are confused about the safety and regulation of dietary supplements for weight loss. This is the first survey of its kind to address the increasing use of dietary supplements for weight loss and to explore consumer perceptions and their experiences with these products. According to Tom Wadden, Ph.D., President, NAASO, The Obesity Society; University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, "This survey underscores why healthcare professionals must help educate patients, not only about safe and effective weight control products that are backed by science, but also about the claims of some unproven products offering false hope. Raising awareness about the benefits of modest weight loss, along with the importance of healthy eating and physical activity, may help patients avoid failed attempts."

The study showed that more than 60 percent of respondents incorrectly believe that these weight loss products have been tested and proven to be safe (65 percent) and effective (63 percent). More than half (54 percent) mistakenly believe that these products are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These new data emphasize the need for increased awareness and education about the benefits and risks associated with the myriad of weight loss products available. The survey of 3,500 Americans was developed as a collaboration between the University of Connecticut's Center for Survey Research & Analysis, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Weight Loss and GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare.

Confusion Over Safety and Regulation of Dietary Supplements for Weight Loss

The survey findings highlighted that many adults are confused about the safety and regulation of dietary supplements for weight loss.

- * Comparative ratings suggest that survey respondents considered dietary supplements for weight loss treatments to be safer but less effective than prescription weight loss drugs.
- * Of note, African-Americans (50 percent) and Hispanics (49 percent) were more likely than Caucasians (36 percent) to believe that these products were safer than over-the-counter weight loss drugs or than prescription weight loss drugs.
- * Sixty-four percent of those surveyed believed that products were required to display warnings about potential side effects when, in fact, there is no such requirement. Currently, there are no over-the-counter weight loss products approved by the FDA.

Patient Efforts and Physician Interaction

More than 90 percent of self-identified overweight or obese American adults surveyed recognize the health benefits of losing weight and that being overweight increases their risk of disease. However, less than one-third of those surveyed consulted their physician as a resource in the attempt to lose weight -- of those respondents only 15 percent used FDA-approved treatments to aid in weight loss, but more than twice that many -- 34 percent -- used potentially unproven weight loss products.

Those surveyed reported that they had made an average of 15 serious and deliberate weight loss efforts in their lifetime, defined as attempts maintained for more than three days. The top three weight loss strategies employed were self-directed exercise (90 percent), dieting (72 percent) and the use of products such as dietary supplements, appetite suppressants and herbal products (34 percent). In terms of realistic expectations of weight loss, those surveyed were found to have high aspirational goals; however, their actual weight loss did not meet those goals. Furthermore, those

surveyed set higher goals for weight loss after falling short of meeting these goals, rather than setting realistic goals, based on their most recent weight loss attempt.

Complicating the issue, the survey revealed that patients do not consult their physician regarding weight control. "It is encouraging that so many patients realize the importance of losing weight as part of a healthy lifestyle, but alarming that so few discuss weight loss options with their physician," said Christine Kraus, Ph.D., Associate Director, Center for Survey Research & Analysis. "The result, it seems, is that they're lacking accurate information on the best programs and products to help them achieve their weight loss goals."

The survey also found that patients are not utilizing their physician as a resource to help them lose weight, but also, physicians are not advising their patients on weight loss strategies. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of overweight and close to half (40 percent) of obese persons had never been advised by their doctor to lose weight and even fewer were inclined to consult a doctor regarding weight loss. Survey results also showed that though one out of six self-identified overweight people use prescription weight loss medications, accompanying physician counseling is often incomplete.

"Patients need to know that they can trust their healthcare provider to help guide them along an appropriate path to realistic weight loss," added Dr. Wadden.

About Overweight and Obesity

Currently, approximately 65 percent of U.S. adults are overweight or obese, according to the National Institutes of Health. Research suggests that overweight individuals appear to be on the pathway to obesity.(i,ii) Overweight and obesity are associated with an increased risk of developing health problems such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes and heart disease.(iii) Factors that can contribute to overweight include an abundance of high-calorie foods, low levels of physical activity, behavior, environment, and genetics.(iv) Multiple studies have shown that a modest reduction in weight improves health outcomes significantly in overweight or obese patients.(v,vi)

About the University of Connecticut's Center for Survey Research & Analysis

The Center for Survey Research & Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut is a non-partisan, non-profit survey research facility dedicated to the study of public opinion. CSRA is nationally and internationally recognized as a leader in the field of public opinion research. The scope of CSRA projects ranges from national and international studies of public opinion and public policy to local community-based surveys.

About the Survey

The survey was conducted between November 18, 2005 and January 10, 2006, with a hiatus over the holidays, by The Center for Survey Research & Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut, a non-partisan, non-profit survey research facility dedicated to the study of public opinion. Using random digit-dialing, 64,025 telephone numbers were dialed and 12,599 households were reached. A sample of 3,500 people completed the in-depth telephone interview for a response rate of 28 percent. The maximum expected sampling error associated with a sample of this size would be 1.66 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. The survey was funded by GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare.

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- (iii) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: "Overweight and Obesity." <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/>. Accessed 12/22/05.
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