



Fraud Watch Network

Scams & Fraud

Weight-Loss Scams

[AARP.org/money/scams-fraud](https://www.aarp.org/money/scams-fraud)

Nearly half of American adults and well over half of American women are trying to lose weight, according to a 2018 study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Those figures fuel a \$70 billion weight-loss industry — and a widespread trade in dubious products that will reduce only your bank account.

Diet scams rank No. 1 among health care frauds reported to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), with on-the-make marketers deploying a variety of tricks to get people to purchase their wares.

Some create websites that look like those of legitimate magazines and news organizations and fill them with phony articles claiming that celebrities have achieved amazing results from their products. The FTC recently obtained a \$500,000 settlement from affiliate marketers in Florida who the agency said sent emails from hacked accounts to trick potential customers into thinking a friend or family member was urging them to try some weight-loss miracle pill.

These swindles don't just peddle disappointment to people eager to slim down; some pose health risks from harmful hidden ingredients. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has discovered that numerous weight-loss products contain drugs such as sibutramine, a controlled substance that was taken off the market in 2010 because, among other dangers, it

can significantly increase blood pressure and heart rate and raise the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Even “free” trial offers can do damage to your wallet, because they often come with big hidden charges. You might be unwittingly enrolled in a costly subscription plan. If you sign up for monthly orders, the bill for them might come due all at once, along with charges for items you didn’t ask for. Marketers may offer no-risk, money-back guarantees, but the FTC warns that unsatisfied consumers will find it almost impossible to cancel or get a refund.

Warning Signs

- Advertisements tout weight-loss products with hyperbolic terms such as “miracle,” “revolutionary” or “scientific breakthrough.”
- A product or program promises you’ll lose a specific amount of weight per day, week or month.
- Claims sound too good to be true, such as that you can lose weight while eating as much as you want.

Do's

- Do seek advice from a trustworthy source, such as your doctor or a dietitian, before you buy a weight-loss product. A professional can help you figure out whether the item is safe and effective or suggest better ways to lose those pounds.
- Do a fact-check. If a product claims to be backed by scientific studies, look them up. Do they exist? Have the results been described accurately? Are the researchers credible?
- Do check out a weight-loss company’s reputation by searching the [Better Business Bureau database](#).
- Do be wary of weight-loss products touted as “natural” or “herbal.” The [Maryland Attorney General’s office cautions](#) that those words don’t necessarily mean “safe” or “wholesome,” and some herbal ingredients are toxic in certain doses.

- Do carefully scrutinize the terms if you sign up online for a free trial of something. Watch for pre-checked boxes that authorize the company to charge you for regular orders or additional products.
- Don't trust marketing claims that a product can help you lose weight without changing your diet or exercise habits.
- Don't buy weight-loss body wraps, patches, creams, lotions or gadgets. According to the FTC, "Nothing you wear or apply to the skin can cause substantial weight loss."
- Don't trust endorsements from users who supposedly have achieved impressive weight loss. The FTC warns that marketers too often "cherry-pick their best cases or even make up bogus endorsements."

AARP Fraud Watch Network

AARP Fraud Watch Network can help you spot and avoid scams. Sign up for free "watchdog alerts," review our scam-tracking map, or call our toll-free fraud helpline if you or a loved one suspect you've been a victim.

More Resources

- Report weight-loss scams to the Federal Trade Commission [online](#) or at 877-382-4357.
 - The FDA regularly issues [warnings](#) about tainted weight-loss products that contain hidden, potentially harmful substances.
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