

weight-loss discovery

“Imagine losing

Controversy surrounds the hCG diet and its drastic methods—but according to America’s best-loved doctor, research into hCG may uncover the weight-loss solution that millions of us have been waiting for

“Forty pounds in 40 days—an astounding pound per day... It sounds too good to be true, but today you’re going to meet some people, including doctors, who’ve tried it and say it has changed their lives.” With those words to his audience, Mehmet C. Oz, M.D., launched a groundbreaking episode of *The Dr. Oz Show* that investigated what is perhaps the most controversial—and the most effective—weight-loss approach ever.

Dr. Oz warned viewers up front that what he was about to discuss was heated: a fast-acting plan that some in the medical community caution is unhealthy and even dangerous, while other medical doctors contend it’s the solution for the obesity epidemic in the United States. Also divided are the women who have tried the diet: Some in Dr. Oz’s audience said that it caused hair loss and fainting, while many others happily stepped up as proof that the program can help people drop a pound or more every day—even those who had been unable to lose weight on any other regimen.

The red-hot plan at the center of the controversy: the hCG diet, which, as Dr. Oz explained, “actually dates back to the 1950s, when Dr. A.T.W. Simeons claimed that *human chorionic gonadotropin* [hCG], a hormone produced during pregnancy to ensure a fetus gets necessary nutrients, could also promote weight loss. How? According to Simeons, by simultaneously suppressing appetite while helping the body burn fat.” He paired a series of 40 daily doses of the hormone with a diet consisting of only 500 calories per

a pound a day but never feeling hungry”

day. His reasoning: hCG stimulates the body to use trapped fat for energy, and this released fat fuels the body so dieters don't experience the hunger and exhaustion that usually accompany drastic/low-calorie diets.

Initial research into Dr. Simeons's approach was promising—in fact, a classic study found that women on the diet lost an average of 20 pounds in 30 days, and 87 percent reported feeling “little or no hunger.” Subsequent research disputed the diet's effectiveness, but a small 2010 study in *The Bariatrician* (a journal published by the American Society of Bariatric Physicians) offers more evidence that hCG does work: Subjects placed on the diet lost 30 percent more weight than counterparts who were put on a conventional meal-replacement plan, dropping an average of 20 pounds (and as much as 37 pounds) in six weeks.

“But here's the deal,” Dr. Oz cautioned: “After 50 years of research, there's still no proven medical reason why hCG would keep you from getting hungry, even though people on the diet say that it does.”

The “unproven” status of hCG constitutes a concern for the FDA, which requires the following statement in the drug's labeling: “hCG has not been demonstrated to be effective adjunctive therapy in the treatment of obesity. There is no substantial evidence that it increases weight loss beyond that resulting from calorie restriction, that it causes a more attractive or ‘normal’ distribution of fat, or that it decreases the hunger and discomfort associated with calorie-restricted diets.”

And Dr. Oz does acknowledge the FDA's reasoning: “I started off this show doing my research, and I was very negative on the hCG diet. And I want

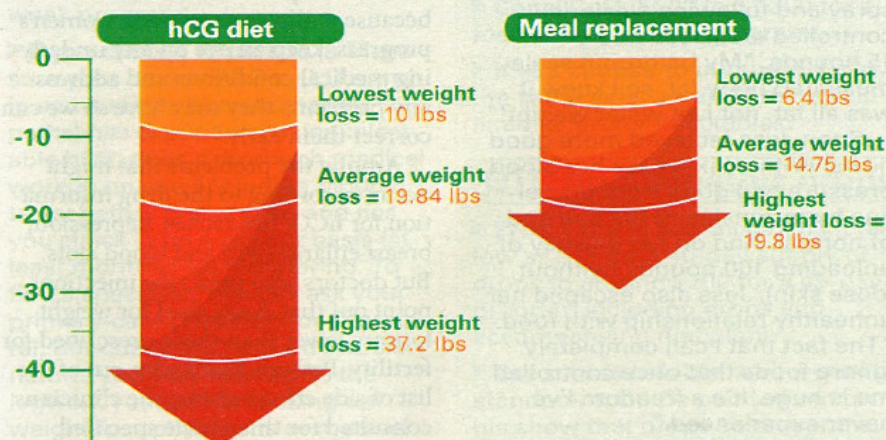
to be very clear on this: I absolutely agree with what the FDA is saying.” But his concern for the health of the growing number of people facing obesity drew him back to the approach. “I recognized that there are some real legitimate folks out there who seem to have success with this. I got curious,” he explained during a recent appearance on ABC's *Good Morning America*. “Is it possible there's a thread of truth to what's going on with this hCG diet that might open up a vista of opportunities for us and help the millions of Americans who want to lose weight?”

Clearly women who've already been helped by the hCG diet—and physicians who've seen its impressive results—believe that's the case. “Women come to me and say, ‘I've tried everything to lose the weight, and none of it has worked. This is my last resort,’” says Sheri L. Emma, M.D., a weight-loss specialist in Brick, New Jersey, who appeared on *The Dr. Oz Show*. “And on this program, they respond. They do incredibly well. It's really a life-changing experience for them.”

In light of the overwhelming anecdotal evidence, Dr. Oz has acknowledged, “Sometimes the experience of real people doesn't agree with the science. And sometimes it's because the science hasn't caught up.” In the case of hCG, that's a situation that promises to change. “When we see real people do things that work, we in the medical profession have to pay attention,” Dr. Oz said. And physicians who've become familiar with hCG are already finding ways to fine-tune Dr. Simeons's original protocol that make the plan as safe as possible while retaining its effectiveness. Here, the hormone and the meal plan behind the hCG phenomenon. ▶

100% OF THESE hCG DIETERS LOST BIG

Protein meal replacements have long been considered a weight-loss gold standard. But in a 2010 study, all patients following a physician-directed 6-week hCG diet lost weight—and significantly more than protein dieters.



NOTE: Consult your doctor before making any changes to your diet or exercise routine.

Turn for more on the hCG diet

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Jess
Wright, 38,
Frederick, MD
Height: 5'10"

NOW:
180 lbs

**Jess lost
100 lbs!**



THEN: 280 lbs

It worked for me

"I lost 15 pounds of fat in the first two days!"

"Will 911 be able to get to me if I have a heart attack up here?" Jess Wright asked, breathing heavily as she hiked up the side of a mountain to reach her friend's vacation cabin. And though Jess tried to make it sound like she was joking, in truth she was seriously concerned about her well-being. She'd been overweight for 20 years and she was borderline hypertensive.

"My day was consumed with thoughts of what I could eat and when I could eat it," admits Jess, who heard about the hCG diet at the radio station where she worked and hoped it could be her answer. "The idea is that the body feeds itself on its own fat, and I had plenty of it."

But not for long. After two days of taking a prescription hCG nasal spray and following a calorie-controlled diet, Jess was down 15 pounds. "My bathroom scale measured body fat, so I knew it was all fat, not just water weight!"

Soon Jess received more good news: Within six weeks her blood pressure had gone from borderline hypertensive to the low end of normal. And on her journey of unloading 100 pounds (without loose skin), Jess also escaped her unhealthy relationship with food. "The fact that I can completely ignore foods that once controlled me is huge. It's a freedom I've never experienced."

Where to get the hormone

The hCG hormone is available in injectable form through physicians who prescribe it as part of a medically supervised weight-loss program. (Though not approved as a weight-loss drug, the hormone has been FDA-approved as a fertility treatment for decades, so it's legal for doctors to prescribe it "off label" for other purposes.

Women who go this route pay a pretty penny—in the range of \$600 to \$1,500 for a four- to eight-week program, which can be repeated to achieve the desired results. But those who have slimmed to their happy weight and restored their health put the price tag in perspective: Patty Christopher, 50, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, who was scheduled to undergo a Lap-Band procedure when she read about hCG in the paper, shares, "I knew I needed to try this diet before spending \$16,000 on surgery." She went on to lose 92 pounds with the help of the injections.

It's also important to note that the cost of a quality hCG program involves more than just doses of the hormone. Women get a full health workup before the drug is prescribed and they are monitored carefully during regular rechecks/office visits while they're following the protocol. Sheri L. Emma, M.D., who prescribes hCG injections to her patients, explains, "Medical supervision is critical because it allows us to track women's progress, keep an eye on any underlying medical conditions and address any problems they may have so we can correct them early."

Among the problems that might occur, according to the drug information for hCG: headaches, depression, breast enlargement and blood clots. But doctors who prescribe injections point out that doses used for weight loss are lower than those prescribed for fertility. Perhaps that's why, out of the list of side effects above, the clinicians consulted for this article specified

only headaches as a possible concern of their patients. And the American Society of Bariatric Physicians, which doesn't endorse the hCG diet, has stated that "no significant harmful effects of hCG injections have been described in the medical literature."

Another popular hCG form (which Dr. Oz disclosed on-air that his wife, Lisa Oz, has tried): oral drops that are taken sublingually by placing them under the tongue. Prescription drops are used in physician-directed programs that are similar in supervision (and usually slightly lower in cost) to those that involve hCG shots.

A third hCG option that is widely available—and extremely controversial: homeopathic drops sold without a prescription. "It's easy to buy products claiming to contain hCG over the counter and online, though many have little or no trace of the hormone," Dr. Oz cautioned his audience. But according to Gary Arbuckle, D.C.,

a chiropractor who was featured on *The Dr. Oz Show*, homeopathic drops deliver trace amounts of the hormone on purpose. He explains, "Homeopathic preparations are formulated to contain just enough of an active agent to trigger the desired response in the body, so they use extremely small amounts by design."

Those "small amounts" pose a big concern for the FDA. The agency considers homeopathic hCG formulations to be "unapproved new drugs" despite their dilute nature. Their reasoning: hCG isn't listed as an active ingredient in the official *Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia of the United States*, so it isn't recognized as a homeopathic drug by the agency.

With this in mind, Dr. Oz has taken a strong stance against homeopathic hCG drops sold without a prescription. His warning: "I don't understand how they work, and I don't think people should take the risk."

Even Arbuckle, who sells homeopathic drops as part of a weight-loss protocol online, grants that the quality of nonprescription drops can vary widely. "The burden is definitely on the consumer to find a product they feel they can trust." That can be tricky since a Google search yields pages upon pages of homeopathic hCG retailers of questionable credibility.

Still, Arbuckle considers homeopathic drops a safe, effective option. He notes, "I've seen many, many people who have used them achieve the same magnitude of weight loss that's associated with prescription hCG."

The key, Arbuckle stresses, is to choose a quality product (see the box below for his tips) and to use the drops with proper guidance. "They're part of a weight-loss program, so the rules don't change," Arbuckle explains. "You should always work with your doctor while investigating this or any other strategy." ►

YOUR AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO hCG OPTIONS

Rx injections

► **Pros:** Most efficient way to deliver the hormone into the bloodstream; administered through physician-directed programs, and so considered one of the safest hCG strategies.

► **Cons:** Daily self-injections; costly (\$600 to \$1,500 for a four- to eight-week program).

► **If you choose to pursue it:** Make sure your doctor (M.D.s, D.O.s and in some states licensed naturopaths) has experience using injectable hCG, does a thorough medical workup on you (including blood tests) before prescribing and has you check in on a regular basis (at least monthly) for monitoring. To find a specialist, you can ask your primary-care physician for a referral. But due to hCG's controversial nature, you may have to do the legwork yourself by looking up weight-loss physicians or medical

weight-loss clinics in your area, then calling to find out if they have an hCG protocol in place.

Rx Oral drops

► **Pros:** No needles; available through doctors only, and so considered one of the safer options when used under medical supervision.

► **Cons:** Cost (\$500 to \$1,300 for a four- to eight-week program).

► **If you choose to pursue it:** Follow the same safety standards as outlined at left for injectables.

OTC homeopathic drops

► **Pros:** Easy to administer; cost (as low as \$15 for a 40-day supply of drops to around \$200 for a 45-day program including drops and accompanying diet plan).

► **Cons:** Less reliable from a quality standpoint. Dr. Oz pointed out on his show that drops sold over the

counter and available online can contain little or no actual hCG.

► **If you choose to pursue it:** Gary Arbuckle, D.C., suggests calling the company to speak with a real person who can explain how their drops are made and how to use them. (His own BodyReset Program includes homeopathic drops, \$179 for the 45-day plan, at ResetTheBody.com.) You should hear that drops are intended as part of a weight-loss program, and that doctor supervision is encouraged. Also, get the company's official name and zip code so you can check the Better Business Bureau (BBB.org/us) to see if people have lodged complaints.

OTHER OPTIONS: Product formulators are developing more prescription delivery options, including tablets, nasal sprays, topical creams and gels. But since new developments promise to spur impostors, be wary of nonprescription products.

NOTE: Consult your doctor before making any changes to your diet or exercise routine.

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Amy
McKee, 41,
Scottsdale, AZ
Height: 5'10"

NOW:
179 lbs

**Amy lost
100 lbs!**

It worked for me

"I lost 23 lbs in 21 days!"

Inspiration struck Amy McKee in church. *That's what I want to look like*, she thought, seeing a woman in the choir wearing perfectly fitted jeans. Just then, as if delivering a message from above, Amy's friend leaned in and whispered, "Can you believe she just lost 100 pounds with hCG?"

Amy had heard about hCG two years earlier, but at the time she thought it sounded "crazy." However, after two years of struggling to lose the weight, she looked at it differently. Perhaps the strict focus of a 500-calorie-a-day diet was exactly what her body needed to finally reach her goals. To find out, Amy paid \$300 for a three-week protocol featuring hCG injections from her naturopath. She justified, "I knew I'd be saving money on groceries and restaurant bills."

The result: Amy shed more than a pound of fat per day. And she continued to see the pounds melt off her belly and hips during the hCG-free "maintenance phase," thanks to the healthier eating and exercise habits she adopted on the plan.

Amy was so comfortable on the hCG program that she completed a total of three 3-week rounds of hCG supplementation (two rounds with injections and one with pharmaceutical-grade oral drops). By the time her third round ended, Amy's BMI had improved from 40 to 27, and she had trimmed 13 inches off her backside alone. "I had to adjust my car mirrors because I was no longer sitting on that 'phone book' of extra fat," she marvels. Another health victory Amy is celebrating: "I don't have the heartburn and intestinal issues I've lived with my entire life."

Today Amy says, "I'm the same person, I'm just in different jeans." And like that choir member, Amy knows, "I look good in them!"