SECRETS TO NATURAL WEIGHT LOSS

- BURN FAT
- CURB APPETITE
- BALANCE BLOOD SUGAR
- TRIM BELLY FAT
- TONE MUSCLE
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A Special Note from the Natural Health Sherpa Team…

Every day we are bombarded with mixed messages about weight loss. Take this, do that, avoid this, get lots of that. It’s enough to drive any person completely insane.

Making matters worse is that most of what we hear either comes from companies trying to make a quick buck, conventionally trained doctors who don’t have a clue about nutrition or the government whose food pyramid is the nutrition equivalent of buying a ticket on the Titanic – it’s a complete recipe for disaster.

But in this sea of confusion, if you know where to look, there ARE beacons of hope coming from natural therapies that have been proven to work through rigorous scientific study. In this report you’ll find a variety of natural therapies that will help you to trim down the toxic fat, slim your waistline, firm your belly and, most importantly, help you feel better.

**WARNING:** as you’ll see throughout each of our reviews, none of these natural therapies should be viewed as a magic bullet – such a thing simply does NOT exist.

These natural therapies are simply safe and effective add-ons that you can use to help you jumpstart your weight loss efforts. But as with anything related to health, you must make permanent changes to your lifestyle if you want the weight loss and improve health to stick.

The single most important action you can take is to eat a nutrient-dense, whole foods diet, followed by engaging in daily exercise. Yes, I am sure you’ve heard that before and that’s because it’s true...there’s simply no avoiding that fact.

The food you eat and the exercise you engage in will be the predominant determinants as to whether you lead a vibrant, energetic life or one plagued by one health problem after another.

But, we have to be realistic – we are living in a world full of toxic foods and surrounded by lifestyle choices that inevitably lead us to becoming a sick, overweight couch potato.

To that end, we could all use a helping hand and that’s just what Mother Nature has provided us in these natural therapies. What’s even better is that these therapies are often not only more effective AND safer than their pharmaceutical counterparts, but they are also far cheaper. And in today’s economy, that’s not a bad thing!

From the entire team here at Natural Health Sherpa, we truly hope you enjoy this report. And if it’s something that you like, please feel free to share it using the Twitter and Facebook links you’ll find at the end.

Naturally yours,
The Natural Health Sherpa Team
It is the year 1910 and you are trekking through one of the most remote parts of India. You haven’t seen a village in over a week and you haven’t eaten in days.

Suddenly you realize that you are not hungry and it feels like you have energy coursing through all of the veins in your body. And, incredibly, your belly is flatter, your arms are more toned and your waist is trimmer...how can this be?

No, it’s not because you’ve been doing daily wind sprints and one-handed push-ups while on your trek; it’s because you are following an ancient Indian tradition and chewing on *Caralluma fimbriata*, an edible cactus shown to suppress hunger, enhance physical endurance, burn fat, and improve muscle tone.

In fact, this incredible succulent has been used for centuries to help tribes survive famine, drought, food shortage, and long hunting trips.

Flash forward to 2010, and your great-grandchildren and their contemporaries have taken note of your use of this succulent plant and learned how to use it to treat one of this century’s greatest health epidemics: obesity.

Researchers the world over have taken this traditional knowledge and use of *Caralluma fimbriata* and tested it to see if it really can curb the appetite. The initial results are indeed promising.

But is this really the magic weight loss aid we’ve all been searching for, and is it safe and effective?

Thanks to overinflated promises from late-night infomercials, biased paid celebrity endorsements, and ineffective fad diets, we’ve all become skeptics of the “quick fix” when it comes to weight loss, increased metabolism, slimmer waistlines, and trimmer abs.

Could *Caralluma fimbriata* really be different? Let’s find out.

**Ancient Plant, Modern Solution...**

*Caralluma fimbriata* is a member of the cactus family and is commonly found throughout India. It is used as a common vegetable in many areas of India and is either eaten raw, cooked with a variety of spices, or used in chutneys and pickles.

Some Indian tribes continue the practice of chewing on *Caralluma fimbriata* to suppress hunger during a long hunt, while the poorer classes in Southern India also use the cactus to fend off hunger and increase endurance during times of famine or drought.

Even with this common use in India, few researchers (let alone laypeople) had heard of *Caralluma fimbriata* until recent years. Armed with folklore and traditional use of this
“famine food,” scientists set out to prove (or disprove) its use for weight loss. And what they’ve found is, quite possibly, a weight loss and diabetes breakthrough.

But before we go and “drink the Kool-Aid,” let’s see what the evidence has to say so we can discover for ourselves whether there is any legitimacy to the claims.

**What the Research Shows…**

According to a 2006 double-blind, placebo-controlled study (the gold standard when it comes to study design) from the journal Appetite, researchers from Bangalore, India studied the effects of *Caralluma fimbriata* extract on 50 overweight men and women.

The participants were divided into two groups, with one group receiving a placebo and the other receiving one gram of *Caralluma fimbriata* extract a day for 60 days.

At the end of the 60 days, although the placebo group did experience some weight loss, it did not experience any statistically significant changes in any of the key measures that were taken, including body weight, BMI, hip and waist circumference, fat loss, or hunger levels.

On the other hand, the group that was taking the *Caralluma fimbriata* extract did in fact experience statistically significant changes in all of those measures – weight loss, lower BMI, lower hip circumference, and less body fat.

Plus, those taking the extract also enjoyed significantly lower hunger levels as well as waist circumference than the placebo group.

Or, to put it bluntly, less fat overall, smaller love handles, a lower number on the scale, and fewer hunger pangs…not bad.

Similarly, in 2004, researchers from the Western Geriatric Research Institute in Los Angeles presented their findings on *Caralluma fimbriata* and obesity at the 12th Annual World Congress of Anti-Aging Medicine. They too implemented a double-blind, placebo-controlled study, this time with 26 people.

Researchers found that more than 60 percent of the participants who took *Caralluma fimbriata* extract every day for one month lost six pounds or more, contrary to the placebo group which showed little to no weight loss.

Additionally, 72 percent of the participants taking the extract also enjoyed a reduction in waist circumference. The researchers concluded that *Caralluma fimbriata* does indeed promote weight loss and fat reduction.

In other words, three out of four people pinched a few inches off their waist size and lost at least six pounds in a month. Pretty impressive.

However, the downside of both of these studies is that the study groups themselves were relatively small (50 and 26 respectively). While results were consistent with later studies, we would like to see independent follow-up studies performed with a larger subject pool.

Interestingly, *Caralluma fimbriata* did have some additional “side effects.” Aside from curbing hunger and promoting weight loss, it was also found to significantly decrease lower blood pressure levels. Plus, participants taking the extract also reported greater energy levels.
How Exactly Does It Work?

The research seems to indicate that *Caralluma fimbriata* helps you drop pounds, build muscle, burn fat, and increase energy...all the things that helped our Indian ancestors on their long hunting trips. But how exactly does this cactus work in your body to achieve these results?

Unlike most "wonder" drugs for weight loss, which really translate into "I wonder if it really works," *Caralluma fimbriata* addresses three key underlying issues related to weight gain: an inability to burn fat, constant hunger, and poor muscle tone.

On the fat front, *Caralluma fimbriata* contains pregnane glycosides, a phytochemical that blocks the enzyme citrate lyase. When this enzyme’s activity is stopped, your body cannot produce fat.

*Caralluma fimbriata* also blocks Malonyl Coenzyme A, another enzyme involved in fat production. By impeding the activity of both of these enzymes, Caralluma fimbriata forces your body to start burning its own fat reserves, thereby promoting fat loss.

When it comes to suppressing appetite, *Caralluma fimbriata* is believed to act directly on the appetite control center of your brain, specifically the hypothalamus.

When you are hungry, your hypothalamus sends your brain a message that you need to eat. Once you do eat and your belly is full, the hypothalamus then tells your brain you’ve had enough and to stop eating.

While researchers are still unclear whether *Caralluma fimbriata* sends its own signal to the brain or blocks the hunger signal, what is clear is that Caralluma in some way interferes with the hypothalamus’ hunger messages to the brain.

It also appears that *Caralluma fimbriata’s* ability to promote lean muscle mass is actually connected to its fat-burning benefits. Thanks to pregnane glycosides, *Caralluma fimbriata* not only blocks fat production but, as stated above, it also helps to burn fat.

Here’s how that works: Your body uses glucose (sugar) to create a high-energy molecule known as adenosine tri-phosphate (ATP), which is what gives you energy. When your body creates too much energy, the excess is stored as fat.

When you burn off the fat, the ATP (energy) is released from the cells, helping you feel more alert and active. Additionally, when this extra energy becomes available in your body, it triggers your muscles to burn energy faster.

The result? Your fat shrinks and your muscles gain strength.

Or, better stated, you lose the fat and gain the muscle. That’s why people taking *Caralluma fimbriata* show decreased waist circumference within a month or two.
But Is It Safe to Use?

Based on centuries of traditional use, there appears to be little to no adverse effects from *Caralluma fimbriata* when used responsibly. To this day, many people in India eat it daily with no issues. And of those taking the extract during the studies, few complained of any side effects.

The only concerns noted were mild gastrointestinal upset, which may have been caused by the gelatin capsules, rather than the extract itself as some subjects in the placebo group complained of identical symptoms.

Still, researchers at St. John’s Medical College in Bangalore, India were not satisfied with conjecture and decided to directly test the safety of *Caralluma fimbriata*.

They gave both male and female rats 5 g of *Caralluma fimbriata* extract for every kilogram of body weight—an extremely high dose, relatively speaking. After two weeks, all rats were alive and well, leading researchers to conclude that even at very high doses, *Caralluma fimbriata* was not toxic.

While this is a bit comforting, two weeks is not very long. Apparently we weren’t alone in this concern.

Another study, this one performed at Intox Pvt. Ltd. in India, looked at long-term usage of *Caralluma fimbriata*. The study found no observed effect for the product when taken orally for six months at a dosage of 1,000 mg per kilogram of body weight. This indicates a very high level of safety.

These are both very strong, promising studies advocating for the safety of *Caralluma fimbriata*. Both toxicity and long-term use are critical in terms of safety.

While these safety studies were well-designed and the results are promising, we would still like to see appropriately designed safety studies performed, where possible, in humans, just to be sure.

The RIGHT Form of Caralluma Fimbriata to Try…

While you could head to India and pull off a chunk of the *Caralluma fimbriata* plant to munch on, that wouldn’t be very efficient or realistic. Instead, you can use a *Caralluma fimbriata* extract.

When you search for the product online, you will likely find several sources. Be sure to choose a product that has documented research and contains at least 500 mg of *Caralluma fimbriata* extract. For example, the research noted above used the Slimaluma extract.

If the manufacturer is more interested in hype than research, move on to another product.

Make sure the manufacturer uses good manufacturing practices (GMP) for the product and be sure you can find all the ingredients contained in the product before purchasing. And, if the product contains a trademarked extract, research that extract. Is it safe? Has it been through clinical trials?

Finally, be sure the product you choose is free of preservatives, fillers, binders, excipients, flow agents, shellacs, coloring agents, gluten, yeast, lactose, and other allergens. Ideally,
you’ll also be able to find independent analysis done by a third party to verify the active ingredients and identify any contaminants.

And remember, while *Caralluma fimbriata* appears to be both safe and effective for weight loss, it’s no magic bullet.

To lose weight, the most important thing is to maintain a reasonable caloric intake full of nutrient-dense foods and to engage in moderate daily exercise. And, of course, consult with your doctor before experimenting with any new herbs or supplements.

Clearly, there are no shortcuts when it comes to weight loss. It takes dedication, hard work and fundamental changes to your lifestyle.

But if you use the proven tools of a healthy diet and regular exercise, paired with the fat-burning, weight-reducing benefits of *Caralluma fimbriata*, you could be on the road to healthy, lasting weight loss in no time. And without the trek through India!

**References:**


2. Lawrence, RM, and Choudhary, S. *Caralluma Fimbriata* in the Treatment of Obesity. 12th Annual World Congress of Anti-Aging Medicine, December 2004, Las Vegas, USA.
Quick...think of an animal that has come to be negatively associated with being overweight. If you are like most people, does “cow” come to mind?

But, did you know that it is this very animal that some researchers claim possesses a special ingredient that can help accelerate weight loss and even help in the battle against cancer?

Cows and other cud-chewing animals such as sheep, goats and deer have a special form of bacteria in their stomachs that convert linoleic acid (a type of fatty acid) into conjugated linoleic acid, or CLA. Thus, when we eat the food products of these animals, as the meat itself or dairy products, we ingest conjugated linoleic acid through our diet.

Interestingly, some researchers have claimed that as conjugated linoleic acid intake has declined in the U.S., obesity rates have increased. They point to two different reasons for the decline of CLA intake.

The first is that there has been growing health and public safety concerns regarding beef and dairy consumption. The second is that as more and more cattle are moved out of the pasture (where they eat their natural diet, grass) and into holding pens where they are fed conventional, grain-based feed, their CLA production has decreased. One study confirms this.

According to a study from the *Journal of Dairy Sciences*¹, cows that are grass-fed and pasture-raised had twice as much conjugated linoleic acid in their milk fat than those cows that were fed a conventional, grain-based diet.

As interesting as the CLA/grass-fed versus grain-fed debate is, the real issue is the matter of growing obesity rates in America. Of course there are a whole variety of reasons for the dramatic increase in obesity, but can there really be that much of a connection between conjugated linoleic acid and obesity?

How It Works…

Advocates of conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) claim that the nutrient helps to reduce body fat, increase lean muscle mass, and lose weight. Moreover, they claim that conjugated linoleic acid helps you transform your love handles into a six-pack by increasing your fat-burning capabilities.

While this may or may not be accurate, the truth is, no one knows exactly how conjugated linoleic acid works. However, researchers do hypothesize that it works on several pathways.

We know that adequate amounts of CLA are needed to convert dietary fat to energy. Therefore, it appears to decrease the amount of fat stored after eating, increase the rate...
of fat breakdown in fat cells, and decrease the total number of fat cells.

But rather than guessing and supposing, let’s see what the research actually says.

**Exploring the Research…**

Much of the positive research surrounding conjugated linoleic acid includes animal studies, specifically mice. In the first study, 2 male mice were divided into four groups:

1. high-fat diet only
2. high-fat diet with CLA
3. low-fat diet
4. low-fat diet with CLA

Researchers discovered that regardless of diet, the mice that received the conjugated linoleic acid had a significant reduction in body fat (ranging from 43 to 88 percent), most of which was in the abdominal area. (Most of us could use that, no?) They also hypothesized that the reason for the reduction was at least in part due to increased metabolic rate and decreased appetite.

A second mouse study³ looked at conjugated linoleic acid dosage. Researchers gave five groups of mice differing dosages of CLA for 39 days. They found that the mice that took the three largest dosages had significantly less body weight than the control group. They also found that the mice that took the conjugated linoleic acid had increased muscle mass as well.

Both of these studies are intriguing and seem to bode well for CLA. But, humans aren’t rodents, so the question remains as to whether conjugated linoleic acid work as well in humans.

**But What about in Humans?**

Now don’t get us wrong; animal studies can be both interesting and promising. However, they do raise the question as to whether CLA works equally well in humans and the answers appear to be mixed.

A 2000 study from the *Journal of Nutrition⁴* indicates that it does. Here, the researchers performed a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study (the “gold standard” in research) on 60 overweight or obese participants. They were divided into five groups, with one group receiving a placebo and the others receiving a range of daily conjugated linoleic acid dosages (1.7 g, 3.4 g, 5.1 g, or 6.8 g).

After 12 weeks, those who took 3.4 grams per day and 6.8 grams per day enjoyed body fat reductions as compared to the other groups, including the 5.1 gram group. The researchers did not provide any hypothesis for why this occurred.

Does this seem odd, that the highest and second lowest doses were effective but not the middle dose? We thought so too and would love to see the study repeated with just those three doses. If the results are the same, it would be nice to have the researchers at least attempt to hypothesis why.
Separately, a 2003 double-blind, placebo-controlled study, also from the Journal of Nutrition\(^5\), supports CLA’s ability to reduce body fat. Researchers divided 21 adults with type-2 diabetes into two groups. The first group was given a placebo and the second group was given a conjugated linoleic acid supplement.

After eight weeks, 82 percent of those taking the CLA saw a reduction in their fasting glucose levels, while only 20 percent of the placebo group had a reduction in their glucose levels. Additionally, those in the conjugated linoleic acid supplement group lost an average of 3.5 pounds, while those on the placebo neither gained nor lost weight. Plus, those taking the CLA also had a reduction in their levels of leptin, a hormone associated with both weight gain and fat storage.

Now this is our type of study…and results. It’s fairly hard to argue with a gold-standard study where glucose levels decrease, weight decreases, and one of the key biological indicators of fat storage also goes down.

**Is the Celebration Well-Founded?**

While all of these studies appear to lean in favor of the idea that conjugated linoleic acid truly does demonstrate the ability to aid in weight loss and fat reduction, there are a few concerns. The animal studies speak for themselves in that they are just that: animal studies. So they are not necessarily reflective of how the nutrient performs in humans.

As for the human studies, while they do employ the gold standard research protocol, they both have a fairly low number of participants, as well as relatively brief study durations (12 weeks and 8 weeks respectively). And, according to a 2006 study from the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition,\(^6\) the short duration of the studies may be a flaw.

In that 2006 study, 122 obese individuals were monitored for a full year. Half of the group took 3.4 grams of CLA a day, while the second group took a placebo. At the end of the year, there was no significant difference in either body weight or body fat between the two groups.

Hmmm. This does raise a question about the effectiveness of conjugated linoleic acid. However, while this study was also double-blind and placebo-controlled, there are two possible critiques that could be raised.

First, it did employ a slightly lesser dosage of conjugated linoleic acid (3.4g). Also, it did not discount that conjugated linoleic acid works in the short term (as the other studies found).

What the study *does* show is that when diet and exercise are equal, long-term CLA use was not statistically significant.

Which basically tells us that conjugated linoleic acid works best when used for a couple of months as part of an overall exercise and healthful eating program. In other words, it’s not a magic bullet. Rather, think of it more like short-term insurance.
But Wait, There’s More…

In addition to possibly reducing body weight and body fat, conjugated linoleic acid has also been associated with reducing tumor growth and development of breast cancer in animals. Conjugated linoleic acid supplementation has also been associated with increased immune function.

In fact, in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* study that found that the nutrient was not associated with weight loss or body fat reduction when taken for a year, it was found that those taking CLA had a significant increase in their leukocyte—or white blood cell—count, which is commonly associated with a strong immune system.

Fortunately, the only adverse side effects associated with conjugated linoleic acid are occasional upset stomach and diarrhea. Which side effect would you rather deal with… possible belly ache and diarrhea or a stronger immune system and possible weight loss? That seems to be a no-brainer.

What to Make of All This…

Overall, the research surrounding conjugated linoleic acid does appear to support the claims that it helps to reduce both weight and body fat, at least when taken over a two- to three-month period of time.

If you do decide to include conjugated linoleic acid in your weight loss plan, your best bet is to follow Hippocrates’ advice and “let food be your medicine.” As we indicated previously, grass-fed beef and dairy products from grass-fed cows are rich in conjugated linoleic acid. And remember, the key is “grass-fed;” you will not receive the same CLA benefits from conventionally raised, corn-fed, toxic cattle.

Because it would be next to impossible (and probably ill-advised) to eat the amount of beef and dairy products necessary to reach the therapeutic doses of CLA, you may need to augment your diet with a conjugated linoleic acid supplement. However, like all things in life, not all CLA is the same.

Much of the research has been done using a form of conjugated linoleic acid called Tonalin. Therefore, should you choose to use a CLA supplement as part of your weight loss program, you may want to choose a product that contains the Tonalin form. And, based on the research, you’ll want to take at least 3.5 grams a day.

There are several companies that have been licensed to market Tonalin. Look for a manufacturer that uses good manufacturing practices (GMP) for the product and make sure you can find all of the ingredients that the product contains before purchasing.

If you chose to use a conjugated linoleic acid that is not Tonalin, make sure you research their particular form of the nutrient. Is it safe? Has it been through clinical trials?

Finally, be sure the product you choose is free of preservatives, fillers, binders, excipients, flow agents, shellacs, coloring agents, gluten, yeast, lactose, and other allergens. Ideally you’ll also be able to find independent analysis completed by a third party to verify the active ingredients as well as identify any contaminants.
As always, remember that NO supplement is a magic pill! Conjugated linoleic acid is no exception. The most important action you can take to lose weight is to maintain a reasonable caloric intake full of nutrient-dense whole foods and engage in moderate daily exercise. Of course, you should consult with your doctor before experimenting with any new herbs or supplements.

References:


5-HTP: A Natural Calming, Cooling, Weight Loss Accelerator

Once again, you find yourself opening the refrigerator looking for something—ANYTHING—to eat. You bypass the celery and carrots and choose that leftover pizza, brownie, bagel, or bag of chips.

Only, it’s not lunchtime, it’s not dinnertime, it’s not even breakfast. Come to think of it, you aren’t even hungry. You simply want to eat.

How often has this happened to you? You eat for virtually any reason except hunger. You are bored. You’ve had a stressful day. You are procrastinating. You are ticked off at your spouse, your kids, your boss, or your life.

Basically, food consumes your thoughts and overtakes your willpower. You start to wonder, “What is wrong with me? Why can’t I stop eating?”

If only you could stop the overeating, you could not only stop gaining weight, but maybe you’d actually lose weight. Better still, you could regain control over your eating and your life!

As it turns out, this may be more possible than you may think.

Numerous double-blind studies\textsuperscript{1,2} have shown that the amino acid 5-hydroxytryptophan (“5-HTP”) is highly effective in easing anxiety and depression. However, over the past decade or so, more and more studies are coming out that show 5-HTP may be a valuable weight loss tool as well.

The question is, if this is true, why? Is it related to 5-HTP’s stress-reducing properties or something else entirely? And is this something the average person can take advantage of right now?

Let’s head to the research to find out.

**Italy Leads the Weigh…**

Most of the truly compelling research around 5-HTP and weight loss has come from Italy. In the first study\textsuperscript{3} from that country, researchers ran a double-blind, placebo-controlled study on 19 obese women.

Half the subjects were given 5-HTP (8 mg/kg/day) for five weeks, while the control group received a placebo. No diet restrictions were given.

At the end of the study period, those taking the 5-HTP were found to have statistically greater weight loss than the control group. They also consumed significantly fewer calories and carbohydrates than those in the placebo group.

In short, those taking 5-HTP ate less starchy, sugary stuff, and ate less food overall. No
wonder they lost more weight!

This same research team then did a second study to determine if 5-HTP would have the same results with calorie restrictions in place. Also double-blind and placebo-controlled, researchers randomly assigned participants to take either 5-HTP or a placebo for two six-week periods. No dietary restrictions were made during the first six weeks.

During the second six weeks, a 1,200-calorie diet was recommended and carbohydrate-rich snacks were prohibited. Patients taking 5-HTP lost an average of 4.39 pounds the first six weeks and 11.63 pounds the second six weeks. Patients taking the placebo lost only 0.62 pounds and 1.87 pounds, respectively.

At first glance, you may be tempted to think that a diet that calorie-restrictive and carb-free would naturally lead to weight loss. But you have to factor in the difference in weight loss. The 5-HTP group lost 16 pounds in three months versus just 2.5 pounds in the placebo group. Now that’s impressive!

More recently, researchers from the University of Pavia in Pavia, Italy, tested the use of a sublingual 5-HTP spray on 27 healthy, but overweight, adult women. In this randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study, half of the participants used a 5-HTP oral spray five times a day for eight weeks.

At the end of the study, researchers found that those women using the 5-HTP spray had significantly greater levels of satiety (i.e., they felt more full) than the control group. The 5-HTP group also had a lower body mass index (BMI) and greater decrease in hip circumference than the control group.

Researchers concluded that 5-HTP can help with appetite control for overweight women following a weight loss program.

So, let’s get this straight. 5-HTP helped shrink their hips, decreased overall body mass, and kept them full? Now THAT’s exactly the type of natural solution we are looking for.

The only question we have is that while these studies are compelling and utilize the gold standard in research, they were done with just a handful of participants, all of whom were significantly overweight. It would be interesting to see if a study done with a larger number of participants, or one using people who only have 10 to 15 pounds to lose, would yield the same results.

**It Can’t Be Magic…**

Even with the low number of participants in the studies cited above, it would be difficult to argue the conclusions reached regarding the use of 5-HTP to help control appetite when used as part of a weight loss program.

That is to say, while it won’t make the calories magically disappear from the five pieces of pizza that you gobbled down, it may help you turn them down in the first place. But how does it do this?

It has to do with 5-HTP’s ability to increase serotonin levels in the brain.

Within your brain, serotonin often inhibits the firing of neurons, which dampens many of your behaviors. In fact, serotonin acts as a kind of chemical restraint system.
When it fails, or there is a serotonin deficiency, results can include binge eating, irritability, and anxiety. Additionally, serotonin deficiency is associated with the brain’s perception of starvation and hunger.

Serotonin is produced within the brain from the essential amino acid tryptophan and 5-HTP, which is made from tryptophan. If your diet is deficient in tryptophan (needed to form 5-HTP), your brain thinks it’s starving.

By supplementing with 5-HTP, you may be helping to overcome serotonin deficiency, which may help to ease overeating and curb appetite.

How to Take 5-HTP for a Test Drive…

Should you decide to add 5-HTP to your weight loss plan, please do keep your expectations in check. While it may help to take the edge off a stressful day, it won’t make the traffic go away or keep you from procrastinating.

Similarly, 5-HTP can help ease cravings and control appetite, but it is not a magic wand full of willpower and calorie erasers. You will still need to maintain a reasonable caloric intake full of nutrient-dense whole foods and engage in moderate daily exercise. And, as always, consult with your doctor before experimenting with any new herbs or supplements.

Be sure to take care when choosing as well as using a 5-HTP product. It should be free of preservatives, fillers, binders, excipients, flow agents, shellacs, coloring agents, gluten, yeast, lactose, and other allergens. Ideally, you will also be able to find independent analysis done by a third party to verify the active ingredients and identify any contaminants.

When taking 5-HTP, aim for 50–100 mg twice a day, 20–30 minutes prior to a meal and with 50-100 mg vitamin B6 to ensure the timely conversion of 5-HTP to serotonin.

If you experience side effects such as nausea, lower your dosage for the first few weeks as your body adjusts.

References:


TV, it seems, has its signals crossed.

On one channel you’ll see shows like The Biggest Loser fighting obesity and advocating weight loss through diet and exercise.

But turn the channel and you have Paula Deen whipping up some down-home, deep-fried deliciousness featuring cakes, cupcakes, or other sweet treats. What gives?

The reality is that we as a country are bombarded with mixed messages every day when it comes to food. We want to (and often do!) indulge in the sugary goodness that seems to be on every street corner, vending machine, and cookie jar, and then we lament our expanding waistlines.

No wonder everyone is looking for a magic pill to take off the weight. But what if you could stop the cravings that led to the overeating in a safe and effective way?

Proponents of Gymnema sylvestre claim that the herb does exactly that: stop the weight gain before it even starts. That’s a pretty bold claim, so let’s take a closer look to see if there is any truth to it.

Indian Herb, International Use…

Gymnema sylvestre is an herb from India that has a long and varied history in traditional medicine, including its use as a:

- Diuretic
- Laxative
- Anti-inflammatory
- Circulatory system stimulant
- Diabetes treatment
- Weight loss aid

The herb’s use in weight loss has advocates touting its benefits. Specifically, they claim that Gymnema sylvestre helps to curb your desire for sweets, blocks the absorption of sugar, and helps balance blood glucose levels.

In other words, it not only reduces your desire for that brownie, but should you cave in and eat it, the herb will block the absorption of the sugar and help you keep your blood sugar levels from rising.

That sounds a little too good to be true, so let’s take a look at the research to get the REAL story.
Studying the Studies …

Interestingly, there is real research to support the claim that *Gymnema sylvestre* helps to curb cravings for sweets.

One animal study from the *International Journal of Crude Drug Research*¹ (yes, that’s really the name!) found that rodents that were fed Gymnema sylvestre leaves exhibited a decreased interest in, and consumption of, sweets.

In another animal study², rats that were given a *Gymnema sylvestre* water extract for two weeks exhibited statistically significant weight loss as compared to the control group.

Sure, but then again, rats don’t have access to Ben & Jerry’s and Krispy Kreme like we do. At least we don’t think so! Which begs the question: How does *Gymnema sylvestre* perform in humans?

A study from *Physiology & Behavior*³ set out to determine this very point. Researchers tested the effects of *Gymnema sylvestre* on fasting patients who were of normal weight. The researchers found that those who were given *Gymnema sylvestre* one hour before being offered snack foods ate less food and fewer sweet foods than patients who had not consumed *Gymnema sylvestre*.

This is intriguing; however, we have to wonder if the herb was the reason, or if some other human factor was involved, such as wanting to appear to have more willpower than you actually do. The closet-eater syndrome, if you will. Moreover, it was only one hour later. How would those same people fare alone over a longer period of time, or compared to other nutrients?

Another study⁴ tested this very idea. Researchers looked at the effects of *Gymnema sylvestre*—along with hydrocitric acid (HCA) and niacin-bound chromium—on obese patients. They divided 90 obese participants into three groups:

- The first group received 2,800 mg of HCA a day.
- The second group took a daily combination supplement that contained 4,667 mg of HCA, 4 mg of niacin-bound chromium, and 400 mg of *Gymnema sylvestre*.
- The third group received a placebo.

After eight weeks, group subjects who took the combination supplement that contained the *Gymnema sylvestre* had more weight loss and a greater reduction of body mass index (BMI) than the other two groups.

Moreover, compared to the placebo group, this group also enjoyed appetite suppression, improved cholesterol levels, and increased fat oxidation.

While the study does show that the group taking the *Gymnema sylvestre/HCA/chromium* combination saw greater weight-related effects, it is unclear if that boost was due to the *Gymnema sylvestre*, the chromium, or some physiological interaction between the three nutrients.

How Does It Do That?
Gymnema sylvestre appears to possibly aid in weight loss in two main ways. One way is by suppressing a desire for sugary foods and the other is by balancing blood sugar levels. Physiologically speaking, there does seem to be solid evidence that Gymnema sylvestre does lower cravings. The herb contains gymnemic acid, a nutrient found in certain plants that have been shown to suppress sweetness.

Additionally, gymnemic acid is molecularly similar to glucose. The theory is that when you consume Gymnema sylvestre, it fills in your taste bud receptors, thereby preventing glucose from docking in those same receptors, thus cutting your craving for sugar and sweets.

Similarly, because gymnemic acid is similar to glucose, Gymnema sylvestre may also lock into glucose receptors in your intestines, thereby preventing the absorption of sugar molecules. This would then lead to balanced blood sugar levels even when you consume sugar-based foods.

But What About the “Side Effects?”

Gymnema sylvestre is safe for most people. However, there are few groups of people who should show caution before consuming the herb. These include:

- Women who are pregnant and lactating
- People with milkweed allergies
- People currently taking anti-diabetic medication
- People taking prescription antidepressants

Additionally, St. John’s wort, white willow bark, and aspirin can enhance the blood sugar-lowering effects of Gymnema sylvestre, resulting into hypoglycemia. So, taking Gymnema should be avoided while taking any of those other supplements.

On the plus side, it appears that Gymnema sylvestre may also benefit a few other health conditions, namely diabetes and cholesterol.

According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Gymnema sylvestre has “good scientific evidence” showing that it helps control blood sugar levels in people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes (when used in conjunction with insulin and other medications as prescribed by a doctor).

Also, research has shown that Gymnema sylvestre significantly improves your ratio of HDL to LDL cholesterol, which is one of the most predictive indicators for developing heart disease. These same researchers also claim the herb also lowers triglycerides and “bad cholesterol.” The National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) acknowledge these studies as well, but feel that more research is needed in this area.

We have to agree. In fact, in addition to more studies involving Gymnema sylvestre, we’d also love to see NIH address the issue of inflammation rather than cholesterol as the greatest predictor of heart disease. But that’s another issue for another time.
The Bottom Line…

While the research surrounding Gymnema sylvestre and weight loss is compelling regarding its ability to cut sweet cravings, its ability to dramatically boost weight loss has yet to be adequately shown.

Therefore, if sweets are your Achilles’ heel, then Gymnema sylvestre may be the boost you need to bolster your willpower.

If you choose to give it a try, the recommended dosage of Gymnema sylvestre is one 100–mg capsule taken three to four times daily. If you prefer the powdered form, aim for 0.5–1 tsp. (2–4 g) per day. You can pour a cup of boiling water over the leaves to make a tea. Cover and steep for 10–15 minutes before drinking.

You may also want to take Gymnema sylvestre with food, as a mild gastrointestinal upset may occur if it is taken on an empty stomach.

Whatever form of Gymnema sylvestre you choose, be sure the product is standardized to a minimum of 25 percent gymnemic acid. (A single 500 mg capsule standardized to 25 percent yields 125 mg of active gymnemic acid per capsule.) Always consider the standardization when taking dosage into account.

It should also be free of preservatives, fillers, binders, excipients, flow agents, shellacs, coloring agents, gluten, yeast, lactose, and other allergens. Ideally, you’ll also be able to find independent analysis done by a third party to verify the active ingredients and identify any contaminants.

Finally, remember that no supplement can overcome a diet filled with doughnuts, pasta, and ice cream. Even if Gymnema sylvestre does help you suppress that candy craving, you will still need to maintain a reasonable caloric intake of nutrient-dense whole foods and engage in moderate daily exercise. And, as always, consult with your doctor before experimenting with any new herbs or supplements.

References:

Nearly 70 years, an unnamed Dutch anthropologist discovered something that many today claim is a weight loss “miracle”.

Many centuries ago (and possibly to this day!) the San Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert ate a succulent plant to help stave off hunger and thirst on long hunting trips.

One day, back in 1937, the Dutch anthropologist noted the appetite suppressant effects of the plant and took the revelation back to Europe.

Spurred by the promise that a new cure for obesity had been found, researchers from South Africa and Britain collaborated to isolate the active ingredient in this miracle plant, hoping to give the world the weight loss “magic bullet”, it had been waiting for.

No more counting calories! No more exercising! No need for willpower! We can all just pop in a couple of pills and our overweight days are over. We can live happily ever after.

Sounds like a fairy tale? That’s because it is. And, that broken promise is known as Hoodia gordonii.

Yes, that’s the same Hoodia that’s been touted through every possible media outlet as a potential “cure” for obesity.

A Quick History Lesson¹…

While most people think of Hoodia as a specific plant that has weight loss benefits, there are actually 13 different types of Hoodia. Of these, only Hoodia gordonii contains the active ingredient (P57) that helps to suppress appetite.

When the South African researchers isolated P57, they patented it in 1995, and then licensed its use to their British partner Phytopharm. After spending more than $20 million on research, Phytopharm subbed out the license to Big Pharma goliath, Pfizer in 1998 for $21 million.

While all this may be fascinating to research types, it’s actually quite telling about the true promise (or the lack thereof) of. You see, shortly after getting the sub-license, Pfizer returned it. In other words, thanks, but no thanks.

So, you have one Big Pharma company sub-licensing it to another AFTER spending $20 million and then that sub-licensee returns the license. Big Pharma knows a profit when they smell it. The fact that they were treating the license as a red-headed stepchild speaks volumes about their lack of faith in it.
Great Spin, Bad Studies…

Pfizer aside, $20 million on research has to bear some fruit, right? Turns out, the press and buzz around Hoodia is stronger than the research.

First, there was the November 2004 *60 Minutes* piece by Leslie Stahl. Billed as the “newest weapon in the war on obesity,” Stahl trekked into the desert in search of Hoodia. Once their tracker and native bushman found a Hoodia plant, Stahl ate it. She claimed it did in fact suppress her appetite and had no negative side effects.

And then there’s TrimSpa and Anna Nicole Smith. After ephedra was taken off the market, weight loss supplement manufacturer TrimSpa, replaced the banned ephedra with Hoodia. After using the supplement, former model and reality star Anna Nicole Smith slimmed down and credited TrimSpa with her amazing new body.

That’s proof, right? After all, it was on TV! While that may be enough for some people, it’s not for us. We wanted studies.

What the (Sole) Study Says…

We expected to find study after study proving the effectiveness of Hoodia. After all, it seems to resemble its Indian counterpart *Caralluma fimbriata*. We soon learned that the only thing they have in common is traditional use.

Turns out, there is a severe lack of clinical research on Hoodia. In fact, we could only locate two published studies on Hoodia.

The first was from a 2004 issue of *Brain Research*. Researchers injected Hoodia Extract P57 into the brains of rats. They found that the rats that received the injections ate less than the rats that received the placebo.

One of the issues with this study is that it was done using rats versus animals. More problematic, however, is the use of cerebral injections. While many people are desperate for a weight loss solution and may be willing to try just about anything, we have a hard time believing that brain injections are the next “big idea” in the weight loss battle.

The second study is actually a case report from the October 2010 issue of *Journal of Clinical Pharmacy and Therapeutics*. In this study, a 57-year-old overweight woman questioned whether or not Hoodia could assist her in reaching her weight loss goals. Researchers at the College of Pharmacy at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, decided to look into it.

After an exhaustive search of the literature, including Medline, the Cochrane Library, Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database, and others, they couldn’t find a single, published, peer-reviewed study on Hoodia. They did, however, find two unpublished studies that had some promising results.

The first study was a double-blind, placebo-controlled study performed in 2001 by Phytopharm, the same British company that licenses Hoodia’s active ingredient. They divided 24 participants into two groups. One received the Hoodia extract and the other received a placebo.
At the end of the study period, those taking the P57 had statistically significant reductions in both body fat and caloric intake (about 1,000 calories less per day than the placebo group).

Sounds good, right?

Unfortunately, because the study was never published or peer reviewed, its quality and findings cannot be properly judged. In addition, the fact that they decided NOT to publish it is a fairly negative sign.

Follow the Buzz or the Science?

Normally, we would be telling you how Hoodia works, the scientific studies that prove the claims, and recommended dosages. But, truthfully, we don’t think you should waste your time with this supplement.

News anchors and former models are poor substitutes for solid research, and Hoodia falls severely short in that department.

The lesson here is that NO supplement is a magic pill. The real secret to permanent weight loss is to maintain a reasonable caloric intake full of nutrient-dense whole foods and engage in moderate daily exercise.

If you do decide to use herbs or supplements to boost your weight loss efforts, make sure there is real science behind the product. That way, you’ll lose more than just money.

References:

3 MacLean, DB and Luo, LG. “Increased ATP content/production in the hypothalamus may be a signal for energy-sensing of satiety: studies of the anorectic mechanism of a plant steroidal glycoside.” Brain Res. 2004 Sep 10;1020(1-2):1-11.
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