

Fat Burners Q&A

Consumer Advocate Paul Crane Addresses the Most Common Questions About Weight-Loss Supplements and How You Can Become a Savvy and Safe Consumer!

By Paul Crane, Consumer Advocate, *UltimateFatBurner.com*

They grace the pages of popular women's magazines. You'll find them featured prominently in fitness and bodybuilding publications. The Internet is flooded with them. You'll hear them being advertised on the radio, and see them hawked on T.V. Your nutrition store has 10 whole shelves dedicated to them, and even the local Wal-Mart is cashing in on the phenomenon.

I'm talking about fat burners and weight-loss supplements—you know, the pills, patches, powders, creams, and topical solutions that offer easy, near-instant weight loss. Without a doubt, they are big—no, scratch that—HUGE business. There is plenty of gold just waiting to be extracted from the bulging crevasses of a vastly overweight North American population. And it's not surprising—the message being delivered by the majority of the manufacturers and retailers of such products is an appealing one...

Losing weight is effortless. You don't need to exercise. You don't need to diet. Just take this pill twice a day, and within a month or two, you'll have the body you only ever dreamed of having.

Of course, most of us know this is a pleasant fantasy. Even the best, most intensively researched formulas don't work miracles. That said, why does the weight-loss supplement industry continue to grow—despite exaggerated product claims, highly publicized crackdowns by the Federal Trade Commission, and even class-action suits filed by disgruntled consumers?

Those are all great questions.

And that brings us to the crux of this article, which is to address many of the most common questions regarding weight-loss supplements in a simple "question and answer" format. Let's get started with the most obvious one...

Q: Does the average overweight individual need a fat burner or weight-loss supplement?

A: The answer to this question is going to vary vastly depending on whom you ask. Those in the supplement industry are going to argue vigorously for supplementation. On the other hand, the purists will tell you such products aren't necessary and you can accomplish your weight-loss goals on your own. Government regulators and certain talking head "ivory tower" types would like to go even further and save you from yourself (by implementing greater government regulation restricting access to such products).



The fact of the matter is that a large percentage of consumers find the purchase of a weight-loss supplement helps them achieve their goals, even if the benefits of such products are grossly exaggerated (to suggest otherwise is both condescending and insulting and makes the assumption that all consumers are incapable of making an informed purchasing decision based on an intelligent cost vs. benefit analysis).

On our customer feedback website (Real-Customer-Comments.com) for example, many folks comment that the simple boost of energy such products provide (from caffeine, synephrine, and other related stimulants) justifies the purchase. That's because they need a little extra "oomph" to make it to the gym and have an effective workout. And as you know, effective workouts lead to successful weight loss. As one individual stated...

"In short, I'm not expecting a miracle, but I believe you are more likely to lose weight if you feel good and actually have the energy to have some kind of work out."

You can't argue with that. And frankly, at the cost of \$1 to \$1.50 per day for supplementation (less than the cost of a good cup of coffee), many consumers obviously feel fat burners and related weight-loss supplements offer good value for the money. They certainly don't seem to have a problem plunking down their cash month after month, after all.

So what's the answer?

Honestly, you probably don't need a weight-loss supplement to attain your goals. But that's not to say you won't find one helpful, or attain your goals quicker and easier, with one. Many people certainly do, and have. Often times too, the financial commitment of a purchase (or regular purchases) helps provide the motivation to kick-start a smart eating and exercise plan.

As long as you have a reasonable expectation of the product you choose, and don't expect miracles, the better quality, well-researched products can indeed provide you with an extra "edge." Whether or not this is something you need is a question only you can answer.

Q: Because it is loosely regulated, the supplement industry is a haven for con artists. Would greater government regulation eliminate this problem?

A: On the face of it, greater government regulation may seem like a fantastic idea. However, for this type of regulation to work, we need to assume that government regulators themselves are highly knowledgeable and completely objective—something that certainly has not always or even often been true in the past. I prefer to

Some in favor of the "greater government regulation" argument also appear to have a problem with consumers using supplements to self-medicate. When you consider that consumers use hundreds of over-the-counter drugs to self-medicate on a daily basis, it's hard to give this argument any credence.

have unlimited choice, recognizing the onus is on me to do my "due diligence" for any product and its claims.

On the other hand, regulations designed to keep retailers from making outrageous claims are probably not a bad idea. For instance, the FTC has recently published¹ new guides regarding endorsements and testimonials, which, if enforced, should curtail some of the more outrageous and deceptive ad practices.

We'll see.

Other revisions to existing laws—like the ability to punish "repeat offenders" severely enough to keep them from continuing to prey on unsuspecting consumers—would be an obvious bonus.

Q: What about "all-natural" weight-loss supplements? Are they a better choice for consumers?

A: Terms like "all-natural," "wholesome," and "heartly" are all meaningless marketing terms designed to elicit warm, "fuzzy feelings" within the consumer. Ephedra, which was recently banned, can be derived from Ma Huang—an "all-natural" source. If you're overweight with an underlying blood pressure or heart issue, this doesn't make it any safer.

As another example, consider usnic acid. It's derived from lichens and found in some weight-loss supplements—certainly an ingredient that falls well within the parameters of "all natural," correct? Sure, but preliminary animal studies show it to be highly toxic to the liver.² In humans, anecdotal reports suggest the same.³

These are but two examples. I could fill this whole article with hundreds of them.

Bottom line?

Although it's nice to believe otherwise, Mother Nature is not always safe or benign, and a product that is derived from "all-natural" sources is not necessarily any safer or any more effective than one that is not.

Q: What makes people susceptible to the claims made by the retailers of weight-loss supplements?

A: Retailers promise results that are "easy and fast" and perpetuate the myth that losing weight is extremely difficult, tedious, and time-consuming.

In addition, ads for these products are visually intriguing, with "before and after" photos, testimonials, and models—who are usually either from stock photo archives or are heavily "Photoshopped" (that is, altered with sophisticated graphics software) to look thinner and more glamorous. Needless to state, the pictures and testimonials—even when legitimate—may not represent typical user results.

Q: Almost every fat burner on the market features caffeine prominently in its formulation. Why is that?

A: There are numerous reasons caffeine (often derived from green tea, cocoa, guarana, yerba mate, or kola nut) is a favorite ingredient of the supplement manufacturers...

First and foremost, it cheaply and effectively addresses the "fatigue" issue, one of the most common complaints of dieters and non-dieters alike. More and more people are burning the candle at both ends these days, trying to work a job, sustain a relationship, and support a family. Often, a little extra "oomph" is needed at the end of the day—to get to the gym, prepare a proper meal, etc.

Second, caffeine is a central nervous system stimulant and has been demonstrated to have mild thermogenic (fat-burning) effects^{4,5}, although more recent studies suggest it may be more effective for lean rather than obese subjects.⁶

Lastly, it's an ingredient consumers can "feel."

This is probably more important for manufacturers than consumers. In my experience, if users can actually "feel" the effects of a product, the more likely they are to believe it is "working."

That said, it's a good idea for you to know just how much caffeine you're getting from both your supplements and your diet (from coffees, diet sodas, etc.) because taking too much can really get you wired and, in the long run, induce dependence.

Elevated caffeine consumption is not without its risks—for pregnant women, consuming in excess of 300 mg/day has been tied to low infant birth weights⁷.

Postmenopausal women should also be concerned about their intake, as research shows caffeine may accelerate bone loss⁸.

People with heart issues and high blood pressure need to be concerned as well, as too much caffeine can lead to heart palpitations and tachycardia.

Know what your daily intake of caffeine from all sources is, both from your diet and supplementation.



Q: Let's say I'm just browsing in the health-food store and a particular weight-loss product catches my eye. What should I look for when I look at the label? How can I tell whether a weight-loss product is decent or not?

A: Although there's no way to know 100% without doing some extensive research first (and that's where UltimateFatBurner.com comes in), there are a couple things to look for on the label. Should you find them, your level of suspicion and skepticism should ratchet up a notch or two....

Extensive ingredients profile: You might think that having a huge ingredient profile makes a product more effective. Not so. In fact, the opposite is nearly always the case. The medicinal plants, food compounds, and herbs that are typically found in weight-loss products are much like pharmaceutical drugs: they need to be present in a potent enough dosage to have any effect. When you find a product that contains 10 or 20 ingredients, you're likely to receive only a few of them at a potent dosage (and that's not even guaranteed). The remainder of the ingredients serve only as label dressing. That is, they are there to make the label look good but are not present in a dosage large enough to elicit an effect.

Unnecessarily complicated nomenclature: Technical language is OK on a product label, if some sort of translation is provided. Too often, however, manufacturers like to disguise common ingredients with Latin names or complicated chemical nomenclature. This makes the product appear more sophisticated and high-tech. (You might be more inclined to believe a retailer's claims of having developed the "scientific breakthrough" for weight loss if the label appears to be packed with ingredients only a science major can decipher. Unfortunately, that's not always an indication you're investigating a quality product.)

There's no other reason, for example, to use "1,3,7-trimethylxanthine" on a product label—especially when it is more commonly referred to as "caffeine." Or to use 4-Hydroxyphenylalanine, when your customers are more familiar with tyrosine. (To decipher the chemical nomenclature and excessive verbiage behind the product labels of your favorite products, visit UltimateFatBurner.com's Glossary.)

The absence of standardized extracts: If a retailer uses herbal ingredients, you need to know whether or not these are standardized extracts, and if so, how potent they are. If a product contains green tea, for example, you need to know if it's standardized for EGCG, polyphenols, and caffeine, and if so, how much. Other ingredients (like yerba mate, guarana, kola nut, etc.) may be standardized for caffeine, but unless you know how much, it may be difficult to determine how well you will be able to tolerate the product, or how strong it is.

Easy, "once-a-day" dosage: Some retailers like to advertise that their product is delivered in a once daily (no more swallowing huge pills numerous times throughout the day), easy-to-swallow, easily tolerated tablet or capsule. Unfortunately, this almost guarantees the product will do nothing for you. The number of helpful weight-loss ingredients that can be delivered in a dosage small enough to be included in a single pill and still elicit effects that correspond to existing clinical studies can pretty much be counted on one hand.

If at this point you haven't thrust the product you are investigating back onto the shelf, there are two other things you need to determine...

1. Does this product come with a money-back guarantee? If so, what are the criteria for obtaining such a refund, and from whom do I obtain it? Many retailers often offer money-back guarantees but rarely make it easy for their customers to actually obtain a refund.
2. Is this product reasonably priced? Products that command a premium price don't often contain a more extensive ingredient profile than their cheaper brethren. The inflated price is probably covering the cost of a celebrity endorsement, or—should you be purchasing online—an inflated referral commission. This is not a cost you should incur.

Q: What makes an effective fat burner?

A: This one is easy: a short list of proven ingredients, present in the dosage shown helpful in published clinical studies, and standardized for the appropriate compounds.

Q: I use the Internet to research and purchase a lot of my weight-loss supplements. Do you recommend this?

A: There's absolutely nothing wrong with buying quality brand name products from reputable online retailers (i.e., BodyBuilding.com, VitaminShoppe.com, iHerb.com, etc.). However, you must be very, very careful when researching and purchasing any weight-loss product on the Internet (and I can't emphasize this enough).

Why?

It's extremely easy for a retailer to disguise his/her identity, or simply not reveal it all. By doing this, it's nearly impossible for the consumer to obtain recourse for an inferior product. It's harder for regulatory authorities to find them and shut them down, too. It's a good rule of thumb then to never purchase from any company that doesn't reveal who they are, where they are located, and how long they have been in business.

There's a greater likelihood for unsafe products to make it into the marketplace. For instance, the FDA recently released a list of 69 diet products—many of which are available only online—that are tainted with undeclared, active, pharmaceutical agents⁹.

Deceptive billing practices are rampant online. The most common one of these is the “free trial” scam, where a customer pays a small handling fee to obtain a five- to seven-day supply of the product in question, to “assess” the quality of it. Unfortunately, the customer almost always misses the incredibly small print that informs him (or her) that failure to cancel the “trial” within a short period “enrolls” one in a monthly, re-occurring billing program. On this program, this customer receives a new bottle of product each month, and his credit card is charged accordingly. When attempting to cancel his “participation” in the program, the customer is put on hold, lied to, treated poorly, and in the end, has no other recourse but to cancel the bankcard on which the purchase was made. The FTC, by the way, calls this “negative option marketing,”¹⁰ and although it is not illegal, it has cracked down on some of the most flagrant abusers¹¹.

By paying huge commissions on referred sales (in the range of 30 to 50%), the retailers of “only available online” products have built up a huge following of eager promoters, who are more than happy to wax lyrical about any and every product on which they can earn a commission (this huge commission is also the reason the “internet only” products are vastly over-priced when compared to offline alternatives).

Many of these marketers put up “faux” review sites, on which they speak highly of the products they are affiliated with, while presenting their comments as an “unbiased synopsis” of the ingredient profile. Other marketers are

capitalizing on the interactive “blog” format and featuring the gushing, overwhelmingly positive testimonials of legions of enthusiastic “customers.” (We have received reports from visitors that such sites are not posting any of the negative feedback they are receiving, since it threatens sales.)

There are plenty of people promoting “free trial” offers too, as retailers pay handsomely for a “lead” (a person who signs up for the trial) as well as commissions on the inevitable resulting sales. These promotions often masquerade as independent blogs¹², created by ordinary people who have experienced extraordinary results.

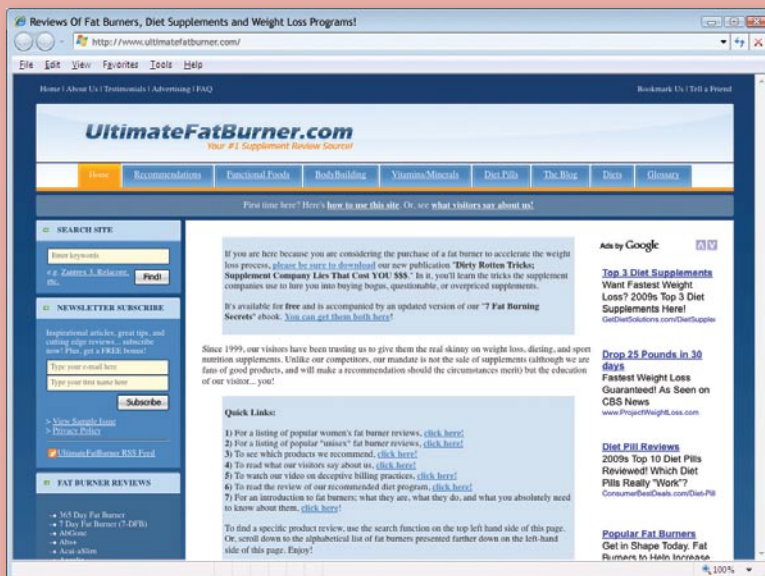
Riiiiight.

The danger is that there is so much of this tripe online, and the message is so overwhelmingly consistent and positive, it's easy to fall into the trap of believing you really have found the holy grail of weight loss. Please don't. You have not. (We've even had people question the authenticity of our customer feedback site—Real-Customer-Comments.com—because it featured negative comments not found anywhere else.) For this reason, it's highly recommended you “follow the money trail” and ask...

“Who's paying whom to say what?”

Q: What about purchasing weight-loss products sold through multi-level marketing companies?

A: These products are sold through a network of independent distributors and are not available in any stores. Compensation varies on the program, but folks earn commissions on any direct sales they make, plus a percentage of the sales made by any of the people they recruit into the program.



To decipher the chemical nomenclature and excessive verbiage behind the product labels of your favorite products, visit the glossary at UltimateFatBurner.com

I'm not going to make any friends saying this, but rarely do MLM marketed products offer the same sort of quality as products available locally for the same price. It's simple economics: when paying out commissions on numerous levels (usually 7), there's less money left over to devote to the product's formula. Products that do compete in value are substantially more expensive.

Since users of these products are sold as much on the financial opportunities (earned by sales generated by introducing the product to your family, colleagues, and circle of friends) as the weight-loss benefits, every user has a financial conflict of interest—not exactly a business model constructive to criticism.

If you're not happy with such a product, you generally won't make much of a fuss about it, especially if it's a friend, family member, or co-worker who introduced you to it in the first place. This enables mediocre products to continue to be marketed with little or no consumer backlash.

How can you tell if a product is marketed via an MLM program? You'll be pitched on the financial "opportunity" as well as the supposed benefits of the product. The product may be presented by an "independent distributor" and you may be invited to become one.

Q: What's the single most important point to consider when purchasing a fat burner or weight-loss supplement?

A: Simple... who are you purchasing from?

Your greatest ally in the quest for a quality product is an ethical, quality-focused company. One that has pride in its brand and recognizes the long-term value of every customer. These companies recognize that in order to grow, they have to deliver products that exceed the expectations of its customers. They recognize that they must eliminate the risk from a purchase, by offering—and honoring—a full, money-back guarantee.

Companies that don't do so will find it extremely difficult to grow, as disgruntled customers flock from their brand to another. A greater percentage of profits will need to be channeled into advertising and diverted from more critical ventures, like product development, for instance.

Companies that remain anonymous—like those who do their business primarily online—don't need to protect their brand. That's bad news for you. And, since they aren't relying on your repeat business, you can expect substandard products sold at over-inflated costs.

In short, know who you are doing business with, and know their reputation. Your safest bet is always a product sold by customer-focused company. Then, even if you're not happy with your purchase, you have some recourse.

Summation

So there we have it... answers to some of the most common questions as they pertain to fat burners and weight-loss supplements. Obviously then, these are products that many people find helpful in the "battle of the bulge." Caution, however, is still recommended. In a world awash in zillions of products all clamoring for attention, it's not surprising to find retailers are competing for your business by making increasingly ridiculous advertising claims, so it pays to be skeptical. It pays to be an informed consumer. And now... **You are!**

With this newfound knowledge and a finely tuned sense of skepticism, you'll be able to sort the good and ethical companies from the rogues and the charlatans, and the quality products from scams. Always question, always doubt, and always, always, always...

...follow the money trail.

You won't ever go wrong. 🍀

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