

The HCG Diet

– What is It?

by William Hignett, MPH,
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How many diets would you guess have been available throughout the years? Undoubtedly, it must be hundreds or more likely thousands, and it seems the more unusual their emphasis, the more attention they get. Do you know of anyone who tried the grapefruit diet, or the brussels sprouts diet? These two diets received plenty of press coverage. And, yes, there really is a brussels sprouts diet.

The Problem with Fad Diets

Unfortunately, too many diet plans would have us destroy our healthy relationship with foods by avoiding or omitting certain food groups or food types. Fad diets seem to appear several times a year, and they take many forms. Some fad diets might focus on a particular food item such as acai berries, or on an aspect of food like the antioxidant diet. Others may be very low-fat or high-protein focused.

Many popular diets lack major nutrients, such as carbohydrates or dietary fiber, or perhaps selected vitamins and minerals.

Mostly, they exploit the wishful thinking that comes to all of us when we struggle with our weight. But, some diets do have useful aspects to them. What about the recently popular human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG) diet? What is it and is it a legitimate approach for those wishing to lose weight?

Taking a Look at the HCG Diet Claims

The HCG diet is also called the HCG fat burning diet. Who does not like the sound of a fat burning diet? If you check the information on a popular HCG Web site (www.hcgdiet.com) you will find that the description of what this diet can do for you is truly phenomenal. The site claims that HCG has been helping people lose weight and keep muscle “since man was created.” It sounds like this diet has a lot of history going for it.

HCG is a naturally occurring hormone in the human body, this Web site explains, and “pregnant women benefit most from HCG, as it has been used as a weight diet since the 50s.” The Web site really states this. Is it true then, that if it was not for the HCG hormone, pregnant women would *really* gain a lot of weight during the nine months?

Does this diet work? Are the claims credible? This same HCG diet Web site declares that you could lose up to two pounds a day and it is a fast and safe weight-loss. They make it sound like great news. If we plan to stay on a diet for about six months, or around 183 days, maybe we could lose up to 366 pounds. Does that pass your laugh test? Further, “The oral HCG diet drops have helped thousands of men and women lose weight and keep it off.” More wonderful news, this is; lose the weight easily *and* it stays off! No wonder this diet has been so popular.



What is the HCG Diet?

The HCG diet is a low-calorie diet combined with the use of HCG. HCG is a natural hormone produced during pregnancy that is made by the developing embryo after conception and later by part of the placenta. HCG is thought by some to help the body burn fat.

A Breakdown of the HCG Diet

Sarcasm and humor aside, the HCG diet is a low-calorie diet combined with the use of HCG, such as a daily injection of 125mg of the HCG hormone or HCG drops. HCG is a hormone produced during pregnancy that is made by the developing embryo after conception and later by part of the placenta. HCG is thought by some to help the body burn fat. The use of HCG to treat obesity was first suggested by British physician Dr. Albert T. Simeons in a 1954 Lancet medical journal article. Basic concepts of the HCG diet were then made popular in America by Dr. Simeons, who in 1971 wrote a book entitled Pounds & Inches: A New Approach to Obesity. This book had limited distribution at that time, but in 2009 a big surge in the popularity of the HCG diet occurred.



“HCG is approved by the FDA for use as a prescription drug for the treatment of female infertility and for other medical conditions. It is not approved for weight-loss, and HCG is not approved for OTC sale for any purpose.”

Since this diet promotes a very low-calorie daily caloric intake of around 500-800 calories, the calorie restriction alone can result in short-term weight-loss. The addition of prescription HCG, or over-the-counter (OTC) HCG drops, is supposed to increase weight-loss and redistribute fat from the buttocks and thighs to different parts of the body. The trouble is that no evidence exists for this concept. In fact, studies show that HCG does not work in this fashion.¹

A combined analysis of 24 studies in 1994 concluded that there is no scientific evidence that HCG causes weight-loss, redistributes fat, reduces hunger or creates a feeling of well-being.² Yet, HCG diet advocates continue to claim that the body will begin to burn fat reserves, as the HCG prevents the body from breaking down muscle for energy.

FDA Forms Opinion on HCG

What does this diet cost? Many HCG diets and Web sites have sprung up as this fad gained popularity. Users could expect to pay around \$140 per month for the HCG drops and additional costs for recipe guides, books and meal plans, but then the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) took action against the HCG diet late last year.

In December 2011, the FDA made selling HCG diet products illegal. The FDA and FTC issued seven letters to companies warning them that they were selling illegal homeopathic HCG weight-loss drugs that had not been approved by the FDA, stating that the companies made unsupported claims. The FDA advised consumers to steer clear of these “homeopathic” HCG weight-loss products that are sold in the form of oral drops, pellets and sprays and can be found online and in some retail stores.

Conclusion

While successful and long-lasting weight-loss can be achieved by individuals, it is not an easy process. As humans, we are often drawn to potential solutions that sound easier to bring about changes we desire, and perhaps that is one element that encourages the continual development of new diet solutions. For the HCG diet, what sounded like a promising weight-loss approach ends up being unconditionally fraudulent.

Sound science and trustworthy research need to be part of any effective diet approach, which has the effect of making credible weight-loss programs appear boring next to such intriguing approaches like the tapeworm diet. And yes, sadly, there is a tapeworm diet.

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References:

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ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

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