

Hoodia Gordonii for Weight Loss?

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Content:

Have you heard about Hoodia Gordonii? It's marketed as an "amazing" new weight loss ingredient that will help you lose weight without feeling hungry. The many advertisements hyping the product claim that Hoodia contains a "miracle molecule called P57 that tricks the brain into thinking you've eaten, and makes you feel full." The claims do not stop there in addition to losing weight, the ads claim you will feel better while taking this super weight loss ingredient, because Hoodia has a "feel-good, aphrodisiac quality." What exactly is Hoodia and does it really work? Let us take a closer look at this "miracle appetite suppressant."

What is Hoodia Gordonii?

Hoodia is a succulent that looks like a cactus. It has been described as a somewhat bitter-tasting cucumber that thrives in extremely hot, dry weather and takes 5-7 years to reach maturity. Hoodia grows in the Kalahari Desert region of South Africa, as well as the countries of Botswana, Namibia and Angola. It is said that for generations the San Bushmen, tribesmen native to the regions Hoodia grows, have removed the skin and spines of Hoodia prior to consumption as a way to curb their hunger and thirst during nomadic hunting trips.

In 1995 scientists isolated that one molecule in the plant that is responsible for the Hoodia appetite reducing effect. The molecule was named P57. The process to isolate the P57 compound was patented and the rights were sold to a British company called Phytopharm. In 1998 Phytopharm signed a licensing agreement with the U.S. pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. Together, these two companies set the goal to isolate P57 in order to market and sell it for commercial weight loss purposes in the form of diet pills and capsules. In 2003, after many years of research, and no marketable P57 diet product, Pfizer elected to end its Hoodia contract with Phytopharm. Why? The process of isolating the P57 compound was way too costly to produce as a commercial weight loss product.

Research

Phytopharm conducted one proprietary clinical study in 2001. The results of this study were never submitted to a peer-reviewed journal however, nearly every Hoodia marketer promotes the study in announcing the legitimacy of their product as a "magical" weight loss ingredient. The small study included only (18) eighteen subjects and they were all obese. The subjects took either the P57 compound or a placebo twice a day for 15 days. What Phytopharm concluded from their study was that the obese people who took P57 reduced their daily calorie intake by 1,000 and suffered no adverse effects. Phytopharm was so encouraged by their own study that they invested millions of dollars to determine how effectively farm and cultivate Hoodia. In December of 2004 Phytopharm and Unilever (which owns commercially popular SlimFast amongst other business holdings) announced a deal which they claim will put Hoodia on the market within 3 years. Unilever paid \$21 million to help fund additional clinical trials and expansion of the Hoodia cultivation program in South Africa and Namibia. Their goal is to include P57 in food products such as breakfast bars and meal replacement shakes and other diet related products.

What Does The Future Hold For Hoodia?

To date there has, not been any controlled Hoodia clinical study that shows statistically significant results for weight loss. However, this does not mean that Hoodia will not offer potential as an appetite suppressant in the future. If additional research indicates that Hoodia works as well as Phytopharm suggests it does, then it may in fact turn out to be a useful way to control weight. Until then, Phytopharm needs to conduct more clinical research with Hoodia so that broader conclusions may be reached. In the meantime, consumers should be aware of the unscrupulous Hoodia product peddlers attempting to dupe the public by offering for sale dried, powdered versions of Hoodia that are not regulated or inspected, and the exact contents of which are unknown. In addition, it should be stated that the appetite suppressing ability of Hoodia has only been shown effective in large fresh pieces of the plant, about 2 or 3 inches long. The dried powder that many peddlers are hawking these days contains such a small amount of P57 that it cannot produce any true, desired effect. This clearly demonstrates that many of these Hoodia eddlers are attempting to make a quick buck off the unsuspecting consumer. If the

manufacturing process was as easy as drying and grinding the Hoodia plant don't you think Pfizer and Phytopharm would have been selling P57 as a weight loss product back in 1998?

Someday we may learn that Hoodia does promote weight loss by effectively suppressing appetite, but until we do, we should all be careful how we spend our money on weight loss products claiming to contain Hoodia or its active ingredient P57.

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Peter Bracato is an avid health and fitness enthusiast and published author. Many of his insightful supplement articles can be found at the premier online health news magazine <http://www.consumerhealthdigest.com>

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