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6 Dangerous Weight Loss Supplements You Should Not Take

This week, the FDA issued two new warnings about popular weight loss supplements the agency found to be contaminated with other substances, some of them quite dangerous or even banned. In December, the FDA published warnings about 7 additional products, part of an ongoing campaign in which the agency tracks and tests weight loss supplements available both online and in stores.

The FDA began listing tainted weight loss supplements in 2009, and has been adding to the [list](#) ever since. The agency has also created a [YouTube video](#) on weight loss supplement risk and fraud, “Being Fooled By Empty Diet Promises.”

Here, organized by active ingredient, are the top 6 weight loss supplements the FDA says you should not take. (And if you’re in search of safer weight loss supplements, see this [list of weight loss supplements](#) that have received high Natural Standard ratings for efficacy and safety.)

1. Dream Body Slimming Capsule, Asset Extreme, SlimEasy Herbal, SlimExtra Herbal

According to the FDA’s most recent [laboratory testing](#), samples of Dream Body Slimming Capsule, SlimExtra Herbal, SlimEasy Herbal, and Asset Extreme capsules were found to contain sibutramine (brand name: Meridia), a drug that was banned by the FDA in 2010 as unsafe. The risks of sibutramine include spikes in blood pressure and pulse rate that could potentially trigger heart attack or stroke, particularly in someone with high

blood pressure or cardiovascular disease.



Many weight loss supplements contain dangerous or banned drugs, FDA warns
(photo: public domain)

According to the [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#), sibutramine was originally sold as an appetite suppressant until 2010, when [clinical studies](#) found an increased risk of heart attack and stroke in people taking the medication.

Meridia, manufactured by Abbott Laboratories, was pulled from the U.S. market. Subsequently the drug, marketed as Reductil in Great Britain and Apotex in Canada, was banned in those countries as well, and Abbott voluntarily [ceased manufacturing](#) Meridia. The FDA's ever-growing list of supplements found to contain sibutramine now includes [70 different products](#).

The diet supplements listed on the FDA's warning list are imported, the majority from China, and efforts to track down and contact the manufacturers and distributors were unsuccessful. The FDA lists [Slim Beauty USA](#) as a source for Dream Body, but the phone number listed for the website is no longer in service. On some packaging, Guangzhou Beili Biology Technology Company Ltd is listed as the maker of SlimExtra Herbal, but the company does not have a website. Calls to one of the primary importers of record, [Greenbuy International Trade Co.](#), Limited, went unanswered.

2. Magic Slim, Dr. Ming's, Super Slim, Lipo-X, Perfect Slim 5x, Diet Master

On January 21st the [FDA issued a warning](#) about Magic Slim, the latest in a group of dietary supplements that contain phenolphthalein. This organic compound is an extremely strong laxative, the effects of which that can last

for as long as three to four days. According to the FDA, phenolphthalein is considered genotoxic, meaning it can cause genetic damage, and is a possible carcinogen. Phenolphthalein can also cause an unpleasant skin rash and irritate the kidneys.



Heart attack, stroke, kidney damage and mental health problems are among the side effect of weight loss supplements (photo: public domain)

Phenolphthalein has also been linked with extreme mood swings. A few days ago, [ABC news reported](#) on an army reservist's lawsuit claiming that tainted diet pills containing phenolphthalein sold under the brand name Lipo-X, were responsible for an extreme episode of paranoid rage that caused her to destroy her home, lose her job, and enter a mental hospital. Sainah Theodore is suing the health food store that sold her the Lipo-X supplements and the owner of the store.

The FDA's list of other drugs containing phenolphthalein includes Imelda Perfect Slim, Royal Slimming Formula, 8 Factor Diet, Fatloss Slimming, and Zhen de Shou. The majority of these medications, including Magic Slim and Dr. Ming's, contained sibutramine as well.

The products on the FDA's warning list are imported, most of them from China. Magic Slim is also listed by the FDA as sold by Slim Beauty USA. Packaging of a previous Magic Slim product [tested by the FDA in 2011](#) named [Floyd Nutrition LLC](#) as the distributor, but the company's website no longer lists the product for sale, and the company did not return calls. Magic Slim also has its own product [website](#), (although the packaging pictured is not identical to the packaging of either product tested by the FDA) and emailed requests to that website also received no response.

3. 3X Slimming Power, Extrim Plus

These supplements were found to contain phenytoin, an anticonvulsant used to prevent and control seizures. [According to the NIH](#), phenytoin, most

commonly prescribed for epilepsy, affects the electrical activity of the brain, controlling the abnormal electrical impulses that cause seizures. Phenytoin can also be used to control irregular heartbeat and other arrhythmias.

Phenytoin comes in tablet and liquid form, and is absorbed differently depending on how you take it. The list of side effects is long and worrisome, including loss of coordination, uncontrollable eye and body movements, slurred speech, dizziness, nausea and vomiting.

Under the brand name Dilantin, phenytoin is given by injection for epilepsy. Dilantin comes with a black box warning for cardiovascular risk, including disrupting heart rhythm and severe low blood pressure. Phenytoin also causes some cosmetic side effects that might give you pause, such as enlargement of the lips, gums, and facial features, unwanted hair growth, and curving of the penis.

4. Herbal Xenicol, Wellslim Plus+

The FDA's tests found the active ingredient in Herbal Xenicol to be cetlistat, an as-yet-unapproved drug developed to treat obesity. Cetlistat is closely related to orlistat (brand name: Xenical), an older obesity drug that's rarely prescribed due to its unpleasant side effects. Cetlistat and orlistat inhibit an enzyme that breaks down fat, and can cause diarrhea, gas, and even fecal incontinence. Like orlistat, cetlistat also inhibits the absorption of fat soluble vitamins and other nutrients, which can lead to nutritional deficiencies. Originally developed by Alizyme Therapeutics, cetlistat was acquired by Norgine BV in 2009 but is still in clinical trials.

While Herbal Xenicol is no longer widely available, searches on the name found a related product, Herbal Flos Lonicerae, for sale on numerous websites. And recent [news reports out of Asia](#) document a court battle over Wellslim Plus+, which tests revealed to contain cetlistat and is produced in Taiwan by a company with political connections.

5. Phyto Shape

According to the FDA, tests revealed the active ingredient in Phyto Shape to be rimonabant, an anti-obesity drug that works by blocking cannabinoid receptors in the brain. Rimonabant was never approved in the U.S. due to serious side effects, including severe depression, suicide and sudden death.

While rimonabant was originally approved for use in Europe and the UK as Accomplia, it was [removed from the market](#) in 2008 and its manufacturer, Sanofi-Aventis, suspended sale of the drug in 2008.

Interestingly, scientists aren't ready to give up on rimonabant or its relatives; [a 2012 study published in the journal Cell Metabolism](#) reported that

researchers had created a chemical variation of rimonabant, known as JD-5037, that appeared to have similar action without the mood-related side effects.

Research [published in November](#) documented the apparent mechanism by which JD-5037 works, helping to validate its effectiveness. By no means, however, does any of this indicate that rimonabant itself is any less dangerous. And JD-5037 will need a great deal more study before it's considered safe.

6. A Cornucopia of Risk

Other ingredients that the FDA has detected in weight loss supplements include:

- fenproporex, an amphetamine-related stimulant that has never been approved in the U.S.
- fluoxetine, an antidepressant with a [black box warning](#) for depression and suicide risk
- furosemide (brand name Lasix), a strong diuretic
- bumetanide (brand name Bumex), another very potent diuretic

The FDA's list of weight loss supplements found to contain banned substances is extremely long, and can be found [here](#). Please check your medicine cabinets to make sure you are not using one of these products.

Have you had a negative experience with a weight loss supplement? Please share in the comments below to help other readers. The FDA also asks you to report any adverse reactions from a weight loss supplement to the [Medwatch safety reporting program](#).

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