

Have You Been Hoodwinked by Hoodia?

Written by Jeff Novick, M.S., R.D.
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Don't be hoodwinked by hoodia. The latest in a long, centuries-old line of lose-weight now "miracle potions," hoodia has been endlessly touted, especially on the Internet, as an "all natural" product that dulls your appetite. It is the main ingredient in products like TrimSpa and Hoodoba.

Hoodia is a succulent plant from South Africa. Lore has it that the San tribesmen of South Africa chewed on it to quench thirst and stave off hunger while crossing the Kalahari Desert.

But there is no good scientific evidence that hoodia pills work. Only one very small study on humans has been done showing that the alleged active ingredient, patented as P57, facilitated weight loss, but the study has never been published.

And there is no guarantee that bottles of "hoodia" actually contained hoodia. "What you're likely to get is a substandard product that contains little or none of the alleged active ingredient, or a product that's watered down with other unproven weight-loss ingredients," warned the UC Berkeley Wellness Letter in an article on hoodia in August 2005.

Indeed, Unilever, the consumer-products company that currently owns the P57 patent, tested 10 samples of hoodia supplements sold in the U.S. and found that none contained appreciable amounts of hoodia, reported The Wall Street Journal on December 13, 2005.

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Finally and most importantly, no one knows if hoodia is safe, especially if used every day for several weeks. The San themselves use it sparingly and not for weight loss.

The only thing that hoodia is guaranteed to lighten is your wallet. Bottles with 60 to 90 pills sell for about \$20 to \$40 each.

You're far better off following what science has proven, over and over again, to be successful for long-term weight maintenance: regular exercise and a diet that is full of fiber-rich, low-in-calorie-density foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans.

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