

# Weight Loss: Are Slimming Pills Safe?



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Slimming pills are a popular weight loss option but are they safe and effective?

Slimming pills may be suitable for people with specific health problems or deficiencies that contribute to their excess weight, says Dr Shanker Pasupathy, Senior Consultant and Director of the LIFE Centre, Singapore General Hospital (SGH). But it is important for these drugs to be prescribed by a medical practitioner after a proper health assessment.

Weight loss pills acquired from online sources or other dubious sources without a doctor's assessment, can be harmful for health. "They can lead to serious complications such as organ dysfunction or failure, if used inappropriately," warns Dr Pasupathy.

Weight loss pills work in different ways depending on their formulation. They may:

- Suppress appetite so you feel less hungry
- Boost metabolism so you burn more calories
- Reduce the absorption of fat from food in the intestines
- Side effects of slimming pills

All three types of slimming pills have been associated with a variety of side effects.

**Appetite suppressants:** These are stimulants and can have side effects such as:

- Nervousness
- Irritability
- Palpitations
- Increase in heart rate / abnormal heart rate
- Increase in blood pressure

Many have been withdrawn from the market after being found to increase the mortality rate and the risk of heart attack and other cardiovascular events.

**Pills that boost metabolism:** These slimming pills have been associated with psychological and physiological changes that are similar to those seen with appetite suppressants.

**Pills that reduce fat absorption:** These slimming pills have been associated with liver injury. Side effects affecting the liver can lead to symptoms such as:

- Itching
- Loss of appetite
- Yellow eyes or skin
- Light-coloured stool
- Brown urine

A doctor will prescribe slimming pills after taking into consideration your health history and the other medications you are taking. "Anyone on weight loss pills needs to be closely monitored by a physician, particularly with regard to blood pressure. It's actually a huge responsibility," says Dr Pasupathy.

The correct way to prescribe these weight loss drugs is to start with a lower dose and increase it gradually. In addition, they should only be prescribed for a short duration of time, averaging 6 weeks to 3 months.

## **8 TIPS FOR HEALTHY WEIGHT LOSS**

Set realistic goals: Losing 0.5 to 1 kg per week is healthy.  
Stop dieting with a short-term goal in mind.  
Stop skipping meals.  
Only eat till you are no longer hungry.  
Drink lots of water.  
Get sufficient daily exercise.  
Choose natural foods over processed foods which tend to be high in fat and sugar.  
Eat fruits and other fibre-rich foods at every meal.