

# Do fast weight loss programmes work?



SLIMMING massages, belly wraps, vibrating belts... these are some of the countless quick-fix commercial options available for weight loss. They promise instant results and fast weight loss. But do they actually help you lose weight and keep it off?

“What these fast weight loss schemes have in common is their ‘feel-good’ value. There is generally no harm in using them but you should not expect any enduring weight loss,” says Dr Shanker Pasupathy, Senior Consultant and Director of the LIFE Centre, Singapore General Hospital (SGH). “Anyone who promises fast weight loss is being unrealistic. You can’t lose real weight with one or two sessions.”

Losing 0.5 kg to 1 kg of body weight per week is considered healthy. People who lose weight much faster tend to lose mostly water weight (which is promptly regained). They also risk losing muscle mass, also known as lean mass, which can slow down your metabolism and have other negative effects.

## Are all commercial weight loss products and programmes gimmicks?

There is actually a positive function for these various weight loss products and programmes offered by slimming centres, believes Dr Pasupathy. Their feel-good

factor may motivate some people, especially those with only a limited weight problem, to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

“Many of these slimming centres strongly encourage their customers to change their diet and do some exercise on top of the slimming services they offer. If there is any weight loss, it should actually be credited to these lifestyle changes,” he says.

However, commercial weight loss products and programmes that don’t include dietary modifications and physical activity are unlikely to have any weight loss or health benefits.

“If someone is looking for enduring weight loss, slimming centres that promise quick results are unlikely to be effective. But there is no harm if the spa-like treatment these centres offer helps you feel good and look good,” says Dr Pasupathy. “But don’t kid yourself that this is going to work for weight loss.”

## Slimming creams – do they make the fat go away?

Some slimming centres claim that the special herbal creams they use can help remove fat deposits in flabby areas like the abdomen, thighs, upper arms and buttocks. The creams are supposed to burn away fat and help “reshape” your body.

“As they act only at the skin level, creams can do no more than temporarily improve skin tone and quality,” says Dr Pasupathy. “They may make your skin smoother, maybe even tighter, but they won’t make the fat go away and influence your weight.”

However, if these creams are combined with a healthy diet plan and regular exercise over an extended period of time, they may have a beneficial weight loss outcome while also helping you achieve some cosmetic benefits.

“Ultimately, the only effective way to lose weight is to eat less than your daily calorie requirements and get some exercise,” says Dr Pasupathy. Ideally, a weight loss programme should include both dietary modification and exercise.

It’s also important to understand that the calories from the different food groups are not equal. Excess carbohydrates have been found to cause weight gain.

“High-glycemic index carbohydrates stimulate the fat-storage response in the body. In other words, the more refined carbs you eat, the more likely you are to store fat. The bread-eating craze is fueling obesity in Singapore,” he adds.