

# Calorie Control

C O M M E N T A R Y

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## Light Products:

### Magic Bullets, Helpful Tools or a Dieter's Downfall?

Americans' waistlines may be growing, but a positive growth has also begun to emerge – American weight consciousness. Despite an ever-present obesity epidemic, public awareness of the problems associated with obesity is increasing, as is a strong public awareness about the need to lose weight. According to a recent Calorie Control Council survey, 33 percent of adults say they are on a diet – the highest level of dieting in almost 15 years. (The Council has been conducting these nationally projectable surveys for more than 20 years.) Additionally, over 60 percent of adults say they need to lose weight. Another 54 percent of adults are making a serious effort to control their weight with many now using a combination of exercise and watching what they eat -- which is demonstrated by the dramatic growth of “light” products (low-calorie, sugar-free foods and beverages). As messages of the dangers of inactivity and overweight continue to dominate media coverage, it seems many are paying attention.

“Weight management is important for health reasons, and more and more people are becoming aware of this fact,” says Dr. John Foreyt, director of the Nutrition Research Clinic and Professor, Department of Medicine, at Baylor College of Medicine. “However, for many the question of how to *control* weight remains.”



#### False Claims Give False Promises

Weight loss and weight control can be problematic because some people are in search of diets offering dramatic and immediate results. According to the Council's survey, more than half of dieters say they crash diet or fast, follow a restrictive weight loss program or skip meals to lose weight. Many are constantly on the lookout for the “magic product” that will drop excess weight, firm muscles and more.

Yet these products more often produce false promises rather than lost pounds.

The issue has become so problematic, that the federal government is taking action. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is cracking down on weight loss product claims as part of their new “Operation Big Fat Lie” campaign. This nation-wide enforcement campaign is targeting companies that have made false weight-loss claims in national

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—Calorie Control Council National Survey

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—Diane Quagliani,  
Dietitian



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—Liz Marr  
Dietitian



advertisements. The FTC hopes to stop deceptive advertising and provide redress for consumers harmed by false weight-loss product claims. In addition to policing media, the campaign will focus on educating the media about "red flag" claims in hopes the media will practice greater resistance in accepting advertisements containing false weight-loss promises. The FTC also hopes to educate consumers to be on the lookout for companies making sweeping weight loss promises with products or methods that do not include a healthy diet or an exercise component.

### Putting Research into Context

Many myths continue to abound about weight loss and weight control especially when it comes to light products. A short communication from Purdue University claimed that products with low-calorie sweeteners "fool the tongue," cause people to overeat, and thus consume additional calories. This short communication may have unduly alarmed large numbers of consumers, when in fact it was speculative in nature, used an extremely small sample of rats, and did not address the fact that the causes of obesity are multi-factorial. It should also be noted that rats like the taste of saccharin, a low-calorie sweetener used in the study, and saccharin is often used as a reward in rat studies.

In addition, a recent study from the University of Texas and presented at the 2005 meeting of the American Diabetes Association alleged an increased risk of weight gain among those who consume diet sodas. However, the study findings are inconsistent with the vast majority of scientific research on this topic. As the researchers point out, their findings raise more questions than they answer. For instance, the study findings do not account for changes in lifestyle (such as exercise, change in eating patterns, etc.), at what point subjects became overweight, nor the type of beverages subjects (overweight vs. normal weight) were drinking at the beginning or end of the study. "The study design does not allow for a cause and effect conclusion. So you can only wonder about possible causes. It could be that people are more likely to drink diet soda if they have a family history of obesity, but we have no way of knowing from this study design," notes Liz Marr, MS, RD, Marr Barr Communications, Longmont, CO, a sweetener expert and consultant to The Coca-Cola Company on nutrition and health issues.

### Sorting Through the Facts

Separating fact from fiction when it comes to food and weight loss myths can be a daunting and confusing task. "Sometimes studies are published and publicized even though they're not peer-reviewed for accuracy or contain

inconsistent science and misleading conclusions," says registered dietitian Diane Quagliani, coauthor of the American Dietetic Association's position paper on food and nutrition misinformation. "It's important for consumers and even medical professionals to be aware that study findings can spread food myths when the study is not based on sound science."

To find credible information on weight management and other nutrition topics, Quagliani recommends asking a registered dietitian or turning to publications and Web sites of credible health organizations such as the American Dietetic Association or American Diabetes Association. "Be cautious about information you find online, especially if it runs counter to accepted nutrition recommendations or sounds either scary or too good to be true," says Quagliani. To locate credible information online, she suggests accessing [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov), a Web site sponsored by the US Department of Health & Human Services.

### Light Products: Separating Fact from Fiction

Health professionals agree that one of the best ways to fight obesity and overweight is to sensibly and nutritiously control caloric intake and output. This requires a variety of tools including portion control, exercise, controlling calories, etc. In the struggle to maintain caloric and nutritional balance, light products provide an additional resource.

The American Dietetic Association (ADA) states that low-calorie, sugar-free foods and beverages can be part of a weight control plan. According to the ADA's position paper on nutritive and non-nutritive sweeteners, "Nonnutritive sweeteners added to the diet have been shown to promote modest loss of weight and, within a multidisciplinary weight-control program, may facilitate long-term maintenance of reduction in body weight."

Studies have shown that reduced-calorie products not only aid in facilitating weight loss, but also weight control. Additionally, a 2005 study published in the *Journal of Food Science* found that people who use reduced-calorie products not only have a better quality diet but also are more likely to consume fewer calories than those who do not use reduced-calorie products. Researchers studied more than 1,000 adults and found that those who incorporated reduced-calorie products consumed more vitamins and minerals, such as calcium, fiber and iron, in their diets. According to lead researcher Dr. Madeleine Sigman-Grant, Ph.D., R.D., with the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, "Those using products containing low-calorie sweeteners were more aware of the nutrients they were eating and were more likely to eat leafy-green vegetables, fruit and yogurt." Thus, the researchers found while participants were eating fewer calories overall, they were also eating more healthfully.

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# Olestra Update

The American Dietetic Association (ADA) published its updated position paper on fat replacers in the February 2005 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. The ADA's position statement regarding the use of fat replacers in the diet included the following:

*"It is the position of the American Dietetic Association that the majority of fat replacers, when used in moderation by adults, can be safe and useful adjuncts to lowering the fat content of foods and may play a role in decreasing total dietary energy and fat intake. Moderate use of low-calorie, reduced-fat foods, combined with low total energy intake, could potentially promote dietary intake consistent with the objectives of Healthy People 2010 and the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans."*

Foods that contain fat replacers, and contain less total fat and calories than their full-fat counterparts, can assist consumers in improving or maintaining overall health. In fact, according to a Calorie Control Council survey on dieting trends and habits, consumers frequently choose foods low in fat as a method of weight control. Seventy-four percent of adults say they "cut down on foods high in fat" in order to control their weight, while 71 percent "use foods and beverages that are reduced in fat or fat free."

The ADA position paper was released soon after the 2005 Dietary Guidelines were published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The ADA's statements support the key recommen-

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## Sensible Assistance for "Lightening Up"

When asked why they are overweight, 89 percent of adults say they have poor eating habits, while 78 percent claim they consume too many calories, according to the Calorie Control Council consumer survey. Thus, eating habits remain a major obstacle for most Americans trying to lose weight. With 52 percent of adults claiming they consume light products to maintain their current weight and another 44 percent saying they consume these products to reduce their current weight, it is evident that adults perceive light products as one of the many "tools" for weight control. And, making small changes can have a big impact. For example, just cutting 48 calories per day over the course of a year can lead to a five-pound weight loss (assuming the diet is not compensated with excess calories). Using a light lemonade in place of the full calorie version would save 98 calories and translate to a 10 pound loss over the course of a year.

dations provided in the updated Guidelines. For instance, the Guidelines suggest, "for adults 18 years of age and older - total fat intake should remain between 20 to 35 percent of total calories, with most fats coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats such as fish, nuts and vegetable oils."

The following statements from the ADA's updated position paper on fat replacers reflect the safety of fat replacers such as Olestra, and note their helpfulness in controlling and maintaining a healthy weight:

- "Overall, the majority of fat replacers [such as Olestra], pose no health concerns for adults."
- "Fat replacers have facilitated the development of reduced-fat and fat-free foods that emulate the taste and texture of high-fat foods but with less calories, fat, or cholesterol. Although they do not replace the need for practicing moderation and good nutrition, they may afford palatable alternatives and facilitate compliance with low-calorie, low-fat, and/or low-cholesterol dietary recommendations."

Foods that contain Olestra can be a safe part of a healthy diet for consumers looking to improve or maintain their overall health. The FDA has approved Olestra for use in "savory snacks" including potato chips, tortilla chips, cheese curls, corn chips, crackers and most recently microwave popcorn. ■■■■

## References:

American Dietetic Association (2005). *Position of the American Dietetic Association: Fat Replacers*. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. 105(2), 266-275.

"Low-calorie sweeteners and the products that contain them, such as diet soft drinks or reduced-calorie yogurts, are useful tools for those trying to control or lose weight," notes Dr. John Foreyt. "Weight control is mainly a matter of caloric balance." ■■■■

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—American Dietetic Association Position Paper on Fat Replacers

