

## An Introduction to Fat Burners

# WHAT WORKS *and* WHAT DOESN'T

By Paul Crane, Consumer Advocate

**W**ith nearly every magazine on the newsstands showing off a midriff or a set of six-pack abs and the virtually constant reminder from popular media that we need to be fit, thin, and sexy, it's little wonder fat-burner supplements are as popular as they are.

Lured by promises of easy, effortless weight loss, consumers flock to these products like moths to a flame. And, just like the hapless moths, yup... they usually get burned. Zero weight loss. Zero results. Zero customer service rep on the other end of the 1-800 "satisfaction or your money back" phone line.

### *And if that weren't bad enough...*

The weight-loss industry attracts more than its fair share of bad apples. Vulnerable individuals are easy targets for charlatans, who hawk their "miracle weight loss pills" on late-night TV, preying on anyone who is desperate enough to fall victim to their outrageous claims.

Like thieves in the night, these scum slip under the radar of the FTC and other regulatory bodies, and when danger threatens, disappear to enjoy the fruits of their ill-gotten gains. And while the FTC and the FDA do manage to prosecute some of the worst offenders, they are critically understaffed. In short, they can do little to stem the tide of manufacturers whose products rely heavily on unsubstantiated claims to make sales.

### *Doesn't look too good, does it?*

While I've painted a pretty bleak picture of fat burners and of the supplement industry in general, it's not all bad. Here's the good news...

There *are* companies out there that recognize the only way to ensure the long-term sustainability of their businesses is to manufacture products *you* will be happy with. Pretty elementary, really. After all, it doesn't take a genius to recognize that if you are not a satisfied customer, you won't be making another purchase—from the same company at least.

Second, while you may have become desensitized to the more outrageous claims you encounter on a regular basis, there are some products worth experimenting with, provided you recognize the limitations inherent to any fat burner.



That, of course, begs the question...

### *What can you really expect from a quality fat-burner supplement?*

To answer that, you must first recognize that a fat burner should be considered as only one of the tools you will need to successfully fight “the battle of the bulge” and help shed good-for-nothing, unhealthy fat that covers our beautiful bodies. *This is very important.*

Combined with a proper diet and exercise program, the right fat-burner supplement can be very helpful indeed. On the other hand, even the best products won’t do anything to curtail the effects of chronic over-consumption of empty calories, poor eating habits, inadequate nutrition, a sedentary lifestyle, and so on.

It’s simply not possible—heck, even prescription diet medications don’t work magic like this.

OK, to reiterate this critical point—a fat burner can be useful provided you recognize the context in which it will help. There are no magic pills, despite the advertising that claims otherwise. With that in mind, there are two other recommendations I would make for anyone before considering supplementing with a fat burner...

First, make the commitment to obtaining your best body, “come heck or high water.” So many individuals are not willing to make that commitment and turn to fat burners as an “easy way out.” Ultimately and inevitably, they fail.

Next, get yourself on a good, sound nutrition and exercise program. There are many of these, but the freshest in my mind (as I’ve just finished reading it) is Stephen Adele’s *The Lean System Success Plan*. It’s based on proven, time-tested concepts that will bring results and is presented in an easily accessible and un-intimidating manner. (In other words, it won’t turn your life upside down, like so many “diet and exercise” books do).

OK, you’ve done all that? Great! Now it’s time to move on. **Below is a brief overview of the typical types of fat-burner products available on the market today** (an extensive discussion would fill this magazine and put you to sleep)...

## **CARB AND FAT BLOCKERS**

Manufacturers of numerous carb- and fat-blocker products have been aggressively targeted by the FDA over the last few years for making false and misleading claims in their product advertising. No surprise here. Anyone who states you can “eat all you want and still lose weight” obviously does not have your best interests at heart.

But what about “scientific studies” these manufacturers use to validate their claims? It’s shoddy at best. Here’s an excerpt from the FDA press release that announced its intent to pursue 16 manufacturers of such products...

“After reviewing the claims of the various products, the FDA concluded that claims being made regarding these products are not supported by reliable scientific evidence.”

Exactly. For instance... The most common ingredient in “carb blockers” is white kidney bean extract or *Phaseolus vulgaris*. In vitro studies showed that *Phaseolus vulgaris* inhibited the activity of an enzyme called alpha-amylase, which is needed to break starches down into the simple sugars that are easily absorbed by the body. But it’s too early to claim miraculous weight-loss effects in humans. In fact, a recent UCLA clinical study on *Phaseolus vulgaris* concluded...

“Clinical trends were identified for weight loss and a decrease in triglycerides, although statistical significance was not reached.”

In other words, white kidney bean extract looks promising, but its effects are hardly earth shattering.



If there’s one carb blocker worth considering at this time, it may be SuperCitriMax™. SuperCitriMax is a special concentrated form of hydroxycitric acid that is bonded to calcium and magnesium to increase potency and bioavailability. Although studies on CitriMax proved inconclusive for weight loss, a recent study performed at the Georgetown University Medical Center on the new, more potent SuperCitriMax™ verified its effectiveness for weight loss.

### *And what about fat blockers?*

Unfortunately, things are not much brighter on this front. **Chitosan** (an extract of the shells of crustaceans and the main component in many fat-blocking compilations) hasn’t fared much better in the few clinical trials performed on it. The conclusions were pretty clear... Chitosan does not seem to cause weight loss in healthy people.

While we’re on the subject of fat blocking, here’s something else to keep in mind...

Even when it works (as with the prescription drug **Xenical**), fat blocking is not always such a good thing. That’s because there is no differentiation between the blocking of the good fats you need (i.e., omega 3-6-9 fatty acids) and bad fats (i.e., saturated or trans fatty acids). Additionally, fat blockers can interfere with the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins.

## STRESS-RELATED WEIGHT CONTROL

If you've been channel surfing on late-night TV any time over the last couple of years, chances are you've run into an infomercial for **CortiSlim** or **CortiStress**. If you're one of the few who haven't, here's the gist of the spiel...



"Stress is making you fat. It is not your fault you are overweight. A busy, hectic lifestyle stimulates the release of the stress hormone cortisol, which stimulates the deposit of fat, especially in the abdominal cavity. Taking CortiSlim or CortiStress will eliminate the stress in your life and will ultimately lead to weight loss in the abdominal region."

If you guessed this is completely ridiculous, good for you. The Federal Trade Commission thought so too, and they moved quickly, charging everyone involved. At this time, three defendants have agreed to a 4.5-million dollar settlement (and litigation continues against the remaining defendants). Sometimes, it appears, it does not pay to defraud consumers.

Interestingly enough, there is a bit of an ironic twist to this story. The main ingredient in CortiSlim and many similar stress-relieving formulas is Magnolia bark. Two recent studies show that a component of Magnolia bark called "honokiol" does have stress and anxiety-reducing effects. And interestingly, I've received a lot of positive feedback from users of CortiSlim "copycat" products... not because these people have lost weight but because they feel more relaxed and less stressed on these products. That, for them, appears to be value enough.

Although anecdotal, I can testify to this effect myself. I've used **Next Pharmaceuticals Relora** (a patented Magnolia bark based product for relaxation and stress relief) and found it very helpful for "taking the edge off" without putting me to sleep. Another product worth experimenting with for stress reduction is **EAS' C3**, which sports an innovative formula including theanine and ashwaganda.



## THYROID-STIMULATING FAT BURNERS

For those with low thyroid hormone levels, the resulting sluggish metabolism can lead to weight gain and reduced energy. If the problem is acute, you will probably need to treat it with conventional prescription drugs like Cytomel or Synthroid. If it's not, or if your depressed metabolism is a result of extended periods of low-calorie dieting, a fat burner like **Metabolic**

**Thyrolean** may be worth experimenting with (of course, you need to start eating properly too. Again, see Stephen Adele's *The Lean System Success Plan* for a comprehensive plan on how to do so).



Thyrolean contains **guggulsterones**, **L-tyrosine**, **phosphates**, and *Garcinia cambogia*, a combination shown in one study to result in modest weight loss. Guggulsterones have been shown in several studies to increase thyroid activity by ramping up the conversion of T4 to T3. L-Tyrosine, too, may have a beneficial effect on thyroid hormone levels.

Other thyroid-stimulating products often contain *bladder wrack* (also labeled as fucus or kelp) for its iodine concentration. Iodine is a vital substrate of the main thyroid hormones. However, bladder wrack should be used with caution because of its high iodine content. Too much iodine can cause many more problems than it solves. Generally, any supplement that provides more than 150 mcg of iodine per day should be avoided. One additional caveat: bladder wrack is also notorious for its ability to concentrate heavy metals, as such, poisoning can occur at higher dosage levels.

## THERMOGENIC FAT BURNERS

These are probably the fat burners you are most familiar with. They contain natural stimulants that can mildly (or severely, depending on how much you consume) affect the central nervous system, usually in the form of caffeine and synephrine, and work by activating key thermogenic enzymes in the liver to stimulate the metabolic rate.

As I'm sure you know, ephedra was a major component of most stimulant-based fat burners until it was banned in the U.S. in 2003. Early this year, a judge in Idaho overturned the ruling (as it pertained to supplements containing 10 mg of ephedra or less per serving). The FDA has announced its intent to appeal the ruling.

**Synephrine**, oftentimes labeled as a "chemical cousin" of ephedra, is derived from bitter orange (also commonly labeled as *Citrus aurantium*). Theoretically, bitter orange extracts should be decent fat burners, since active constituents synephrine and phenylephrine are both sympathetic alpha-agonists. However, clinical data confirming the effectiveness of bitter orange as an effective fat burner is in darn short supply at this time.

The **caffeine** content in many popular fat burners is often derived from herbal sources (like **kola nut**, **yerba mate**, **green tea**, **guarana**, etc.) or cocoa. There are distinct benefits of doing this—these sources often contain other xanthines (caffeine-like substances), antioxidants, and in the case of green tea, something called EGCG (epigallocatechin gallate), which preliminary studies have shown to be effective for weight loss.

Occasionally, the combination of caffeine-rich herbals can provide synergetic benefits as well. The combination of yerba mate, guarana, and damiana, for instance, has been shown to delay gastric emptying and increase satiety. One study, in fact, showed the combination imparted up to 11 times more weight loss than the placebo group. Green tea, when coupled with guarana, has been shown to increase energy expenditure over a 24-hour period.

Generally, such ingredients are welcome in any fat burner. If there's any caveat, it's simply that in the face of the ephedra ban, many supplement manufacturers are dumping excessive amounts of caffeine into their formulas. I've received emails from many consumers who have suffered nasty side effects as a result. So, always check the amount of caffeine. A good rule of thumb is to stay away from anything with over 200 mg of caffeine per serving.

Moral of this story? Always experiment with reputable brands, and always start off with the lowest possible dose to assess your tolerance. **iSatori's Lean System 7** (which also contains a promising, newly patented ingredient called **7-Keto™**) is a good all-around choice as a thermogenic fat burner. Lean System 7's recently published clinical study can be found on the medical website PubMed too, which is a big plus.



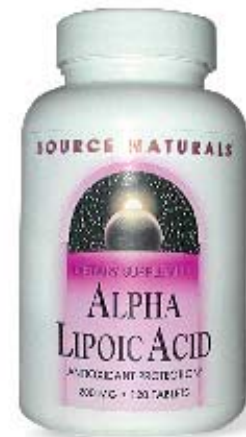
Another decent thermogenic is **Lean Fire v.2** from Instone. There are a couple of decent ingredients in this compilation, a few “so-so” ones, and a ton of caffeine. (Again, if you're going to experiment with this product, start with the lowest dose to assess your tolerance.)

## BLOOD SUGAR MODERATORS

These supplements work by regulating insulin function, stabilizing the vacillating blood sugar levels that lead to uncontrollable cravings for sweets, binge eating, and depressed energy levels. While they do not actually burn fat or raise your metabolism, their insulin regulating effects help you avoid over-eating of all the wrong foods. This, of course, keeps your diet on target and could, in a roundabout way, lead to weight loss.

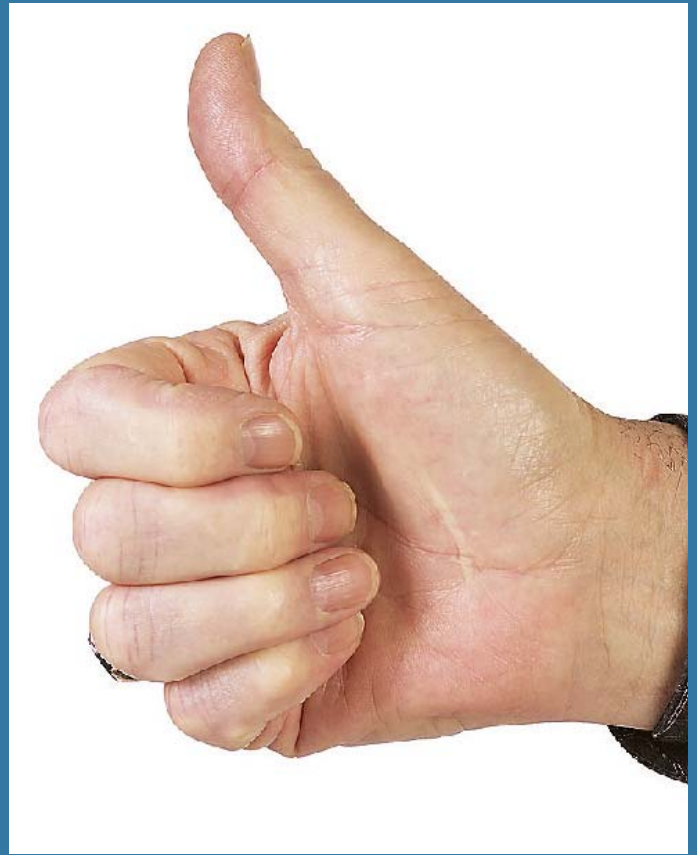
Helpful ingredients include **chromium polynicotinate**, **alpha-lipoic acid**, **vanadium**, **banaba extract**, and **Gymnema sylvestre**.

For anyone who is hypoglycemic or consumes too many simple carbohydrates (sweets, refined grains, or any high G.I. foods), a blood sugar moderator—either in isolation or as part of a more comprehensive formula—is a no brainer. My current favorite is alpha-lipoic acid, which also happens to be a fantastic antioxidant. Be sure to take your single 100-mg capsule with a meal... otherwise, you'll need to have an anti-acid handy!



## TIPS FOR BUYING FAT-BURNER SUPPLEMENTS:

- 1 It goes without saying, buy from a trusted brand. One that you, a friend, or your doctor has dealt with or knows of.
- 2 Seek a published, peer-reviewed study on the formula, not just on the individual ingredients. If you are unsure, visit PubMed online and do a search.
- 3 Always look for an unconditional money-back guarantee (at least 30 days to be safe)
- 4 As the saying goes, be wary of claims that seem "too good to be true." In other words, resist buying into the hype.
- 5 Don't ever buy a fat burner with the belief that it will replace a good diet and exercise program, because it won't.



## SUMMARY

As with all supplement choices within a category, you can find good and bad products. Some that, when combined with smart eating and regular exercise, can help you shed fat faster. Others that, despite ridiculous promises, will provide minimum, at best, help. So, first... make sure your nutrition and exercise program are in order. After that, you may want to consider one of the quality "fat-burner" supplements I've mentioned.

By the way, if you've had a good (or bad) experience with any fat-burner supplements, I'd love to hear about it. You can email me anytime at [Paul@UltimateFatBurner.com](mailto:Paul@UltimateFatBurner.com), or you can come in and join the lively Message Board and read about other people's experiences, up-to-date reviews, and share your story at [RealSolutionsMag.com](http://RealSolutionsMag.com) ☺

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Paul Crane is the Webmaster of [UltimateFatBurner.com](http://UltimateFatBurner.com), the most trusted and respected review website on the net. Since 1999, [UltimateFatBurner.com](http://UltimateFatBurner.com) has been delighting visitors with honest, heartfelt, and balanced reviews of fat burners, diet supplements, and sports performance supplements.

### REFERENCES:

- Andersen, T., and Fogh, J., "Weight Loss and Delayed Gastric Emptying Following a South American Herbal Preparation in Overweight Patients," *J Hum Nutr Diet* 14.3 (2001) : 243-50.
- Antonio, J., et al., "Effects of a Standardized Guggulsterone Phosphate Supplement on Body Composition in Overweight Adults: A Pilot Study," *Curr Ther Res* 60.4 (1999) : 220-7.
- Berube-Parent, S., et al., "Effects of Encapsulated Green Tea and Guarana Extracts Containing a Mixture of Epigallocatechin-3-Gallate and Caffeine on 24 h Energy Expenditure and Fat Oxidation in Men," *Br J Nutr* 94.3 (2005) : 432-6.
- FDA, "FDA Warns Distributors of Dietary Supplements Promoted Online for Weight Loss" (<http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/news/2004/NEW01045.html> <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2004/08/pvt.htm>)
- FTC, "Three Cortisolim Defendants to Give up \$4.5 Million in Cash and Other Assets" (<http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2005/09/windowrock.htm>)
- Kuribara, H., et al., "The Anxiolytic Effect of Two Oriental Herbal Drugs in Japan Attributed to Honokiol from Magnolia Bark," *J Pharm Pharmacol* 52.11 (2000) : 1425-9.
- Kuribara, H., et al., "Honokiol, a Putative Anxiolytic Agent Extracted from Magnolia Bark, Has No Diazepam-Like Side Effects in Mice," *J Pharm Pharmacol* 51.1 (1999) : 97-103.
- Mhurchu, C.N., et al., "The Effect of the Dietary Supplement, Chitosan, on Body Weight: A Randomised Controlled Trial in 250 Overweight and Obese Adults," *Int J Obes Relat Metab Disord* 28.9 (2004) : 1149-56.
- Szapary, P.O., et al., "Guggulipid for the Treatment of Hypercholesterolemia: A Randomized Controlled Trial," *JAMA* 290.6 (2003) : 765-72.
- Tomonori, N., et al., "Ingestion of a Tea Rich in Catechins Leads to a Reduction in Body Fat and Malondialdehyde-Modified LDL in Men," *Amer J Clin Nutr* 81.1 (2005) : 122-9.
- Tripathi, Y.B., et al., "Thyroid Stimulating Action of Z-Guggulsterone Obtained from Commiphora mukul," *Planta Med* Feb. 1 (1984) : 78-80.
- Udani, J., et al., "Blocking Carbohydrate Absorption and Weight Loss: A Clinical Trial Using Phase 2 Brand Proprietary Fractionated White Bean Extract," *Altern Med Rev* 9.1 (2004) : 63-9.
- Westerterp-Plantenga, M.S., et al., "Body Weight Loss and Weight Maintenance in Relation to Habitual Caffeine Intake and Green Tea Supplementation," *Obes Res* 13.7(2005) : 1195-204.
- Zenk, J.L., et al., "Effect of Lean System 7 on Metabolic Rate and Body Composition," *Nutrition* 21.2 (2005) : 179-85.