

They have a pill for that: How are weight loss drugs fueling the obesity epidemic?

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Consumers place great faith in weight loss pills and remedies, buying and using them more than ever before. American obesity rates, however, are skyrocketing. According to a new study in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, false beliefs about these drugs are causing Americans to gain more weight.

"Weight management remedies that promise to reduce the risks of being overweight may undermine consumer motivation to engage in health-supportive behaviors," write authors Lisa E. Bolton (Pennsylvania State University), Amit Bhattacharjee (Dartmouth College) and Americus Reed, II (University of Pennsylvania). "Put simply, why put effort into living a healthy lifestyle when a [weight management](#) remedy can take care of the problem?"

Study participants were each given free access to a bowl of chocolate cookies, with one group advised ahead of time about a new, powerful, fat-fighting pill. The group that believed in the existence of the new pill ate significantly more cookies per person—some participants consuming as many as 30. An additional test showed that the more fattening the cookie, the more the participants would overeat, as long as they expected to be able to take the [weight loss](#) pill.

The study warned that the very people who need to reduce weight the most and are desperately reaching for weight loss pills are unfortunately the ones most likely to then dangerously increase their consumption of unhealthy foods.

The good news was that encouraging [consumers](#) to look beyond the marketing and find real information about a drug was very effective in reducing their false expectations and unhealthy behavior. This same strategy could prove effective in other areas of consumer life, bringing relief, for example, to those who are trying to improve their finances but are falling prey to "quick fix" financial remedies.

"Given the ubiquity of remedies in today's marketplace, more research is needed to understand the impact of remedy marketing on consumers. There is ample room for policy makers and responsible marketers to improve remedy marketing practices to minimize potentially harmful consequences for consumers," the authors conclude.

More information: Lisa E. Bolton, Amit Bhattacharjee, and Americus Reed, II. "The Perils of Marketing Weight Management Remedies and the Role of Health Literacy." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*.

Provided by American Marketing Association

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