



April 25, 2015 – Grand Rapids, MI

## Weight Loss Supplement: The Bottom Line

Based on Thursday's message regarding the lack of any research on the effectiveness of *Acacia rigidula* and the chemical ingredient  $\beta$ -methylphenylethylamine (BMPEA), why did this get so much press? After all, there's no evidence people are dropping in the streets because they've used this chemical. I think it's directly due to the passion of a single science writer and the lack of follow-up by the FDA. I can't be sure, of course, but let me lay it out for you.

Let's start with the FDA. When they found supplements tainted with BMPEA a couple of years ago, they were going to have the manufacturers remove it. That hasn't happened and really, who knows why? We would naturally love it if there was a conspiracy with backroom payoffs, but there has never been a hint of that. It might also be because the chemical hasn't been proven to be harmful to humans, although whether it's this specific chemical or other forms of natural or synthetic amphetamines, they can raise blood pressure and stroke risk, increase heart rate, and increase the chemicals involved in the flight or fight response. For young healthy adults that might be okay, but for most overweight Americans, not so much. When people do what they usually do and overuse it, BMPEA might have serious consequences.



Let's turn to the mouthpiece for the headlines, Dr. Pieter Cohen, a physician and assistant professor at Harvard University. That he is a good physician, I have no doubt. But being a good or even great physician doesn't mean he knows everything. In reviewing his published papers, they're mostly opinion pieces on weight loss supplements. He first started writing about weight loss supplements in 2009; the topic was what was identified as Brazilian diet pills. That article and a follow-up survey examined the role diet pills play within certain demographic groups. His concern was justified; pills containing amphetamines and other pharmaceuticals banned as weight loss prescriptions in the U.S. were being prescribed in other countries and finding their way here.

That led to a series of opinion pieces and editorials that seem to have lumped all weight loss supplements, especially those derived from plants, into the same category in his mind. Read this quote and take a moment to think about what it means:

"In fact, there's no legal over-the-counter botanical supplement that has demonstrated clinical efficacy as a diet pill (1)."

Wait and think.

Cohen's absolutely correct and absolutely misleading at the same time. There are many botanicals—plants—that have been touted as being effective as a diet aid. Strictly speaking, that would mean if you take that plant supplement, you lose weight without doing anything else. There's no evidence that any supplements work alone; even ephedra required caffeine to be effective. So he's correct, but that's a technicality. There are many dietary supplements, which include minerals as well as plant and animal extracts, that are effective when combined with a program that recommends you eat less and move more. I know he knows that because he's written about it. He just didn't say it during the interview about his latest paper on one of the morning shows.

## The Bottom Line

I'm not a fan of using herbs that are supposed to increase metabolism to help with weight loss or exercise performance. We don't ever need to take an herb in our life and certainly not ones that could potentially have harmful effects. But there are many dietary supplements that can help give us an edge when we eat less, eat better, and move more in our attempt to lose weight. Research shows they can be effective in weight loss programs.

If you want to know more about which supplements are effective in a weight loss program and which ones aren't, spend an hour or so with me next week Wednesday at 8 p.m. or 11 p.m. for my [Weight Loss Supplements: Fact or Fiction](#) webinar. I'll lay it all out for you based on the research to date. If you're going to make an informed decision, you need to know the facts.

What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**

**Reference:** Harvard Public Health Review. Volume 2, October 2014.

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