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Drop the Pounds with HCG

Naturopathic doctors and dieters weigh in on popular program

by Sondi Bruner

Marian Wilkins has tried every diet under the sun. You name it, she's done it. And despite a healthy diet and active lifestyle, with each eating plan she'd always reach the same weight plateau.

"I struggled and struggled. Nothing was happening and I was getting very frustrated," she says. "I couldn't lose this last 20 pounds; it was stuck to me like glue."

This is a familiar story to Dr. Michael Lederman, a naturopath at South Granville Naturopathic Clinic (www.DrLederman.com) (604) 738-3858) who has heard those words from countless clients. So he suggested a program called the HCG diet, but Wilkins thought it was just another fleeting fad—until she actually tried it.

"All I could think was, 'Oh yeah, right, another one. Another kind of diet,

and could it really work?," she recalls. "But it did work—I was in shock. Every week I would go and it would be like Christmas because I would see this great weight loss."

"The diet lasts for about a month and the average weight loss is half a pound per day."

At the end of her journey, Wilkins was 54 pounds lighter, taking less medication and healthy enough to travel again.

"I was amazed," she says. "I found it so easy, I just wanted to keep going forever. I sailed through it feeling more and more terrific. I've never felt so well in my life, never."

What is the HCG diet?

The HCG diet originated in the 1950s and has recently rebounded in popularity. HCG stands for human chorionic gonadotropin. It's a hormone produced by pregnant women and it uses stored fat to nourish developing babies. Coupled with a 500-calorie-a-day eating plan, the diet promises accelerated weight loss success by burning fat stores, reprogramming your metabolism, controlling hunger and boosting energy.

HCG is administered by injection or oral drops, and patients can choose between the pharmaceutical-grade hormone and the homeopathic version, which contains the energetic, diluted essence of HCG. The diet lasts for about a month and the average weight loss is half a pound per day.

Dr. Allana Polo at the Columbia Integrated Health Center in New

"The diet promises accelerated weight loss success by burning fat stores, reprogramming your metabolism, controlling hunger and boosting energy."

Westminster, who has been offering the diet as part of her practice for a year, says that HCG is the easiest and quickest path to weight loss. (www.drallanapolo.com (778) 397-3979)

"This one works better than any other diet I've seen. And I've seen a lot of diets," she says. "This is 30 or 40 days and you can drop a phenomenal amount of weight. That's what people want—they want results. Our world has become such an instant gratification place. You really see results in the first week, which keeps people going."

Motivation is something that many HCG patients can relate to. At 50 years old, Allan Lynds, a patient of Dr. Lederman's, has tried a number of diets and finally found success using HCG. In three months, he lost 55 pounds, eight inches off his waist and an inch and a half from his neck. He's still 30 pounds away from his goal, but he's not worried about dropping the weight.

"It's the best diet I've ever seen. The nice thing is it's not a pipe dream—it's really attainable," he says. "With this diet, you're seeing immediate results. Once you see yourself losing 10 pounds in two weeks, it gets your body going and your mind going. It's incredible."

Dr. Lederman has been offering the HCG program for three years now and is wholly enthusiastic about the diet's ability to change lives.

"It's a tremendous transformation of the individual. It affects them on so many levels," he says. "It's very exciting. I have

a lot of passion towards this program because of the feedback. When we do the HCG diet [patients are] comfortable, they're not hungry, they're losing fat and they're keeping the weight off. It's very success-oriented."

Is the weight loss sustainable?

How do people manage on 500 calories a day, and is that weight loss sustainable in the long term? Dr. Lederman and Dr. Polo say that while you are consuming less food, you are still receiving energy from the fat being burned by HCG. So

"How do people manage on 500 calories a day, and is that weight loss sustainable?"

you're still technically "eating," just not by mouth. Dr. Lederman has also modified the diet, allowing more calories for some patients. Once dieters are finished taking HCG, they gradually increase their calories.

However, no one seems to be complaining of hunger. Emma Rochester*, who used the homeopathic version of HCG under Dr. Lederman's care, had a goal of losing 25 pounds. She ended up losing 46 pounds and dropped from a size 14 to a size 4. She says she felt great while dieting.

"I felt amazing while I was doing it. I never once felt hungry. In fact, I felt

almost euphoric," she says. "Now, my energy level has skyrocketed. I feel 20 years younger. I feel healthy, my mood's improved, I don't have hormonal fluctuations. I feel great, I look great, and I'm wearing clothes that I never thought I'd be able to wear."

Both Dr. Lederman and Dr. Polo also use supplements such as B vitamins, electrolytes and antioxidants, which reduce the risk of patients feeling fatigued or lightheaded while dieting. Since there are plenty of toxins stored in fat tissue, Dr. Lederman provides his patients with liver support and infrared sauna treatments to encourage detoxification, while Dr. Polo guides her patients through a detox after they finish taking HCG.

Lynds remarks that part of the reason HCG has been so successful for him is it educated him about healthy eating.

"It's all about knowledge and that's what this diet teaches you," he says. "It's definitely changed my outlook on food and I pay more attention to how my body reacts when I eat things like pasta, cheeses or milk."

Dr. Polo says if patients don't return to eating junk food, they won't gain the weight back, since HCG resets the body's metabolism.

"HCG as a hormone has the ability to reset your hypothalamus, which is your set point for your metabolism," she says. "You should keep the weight off because the hormonal balance of your hypothalamus has actually been changed. I have patients who have been off it for close to a



Dr. Weidong Yu, Dr. TCM

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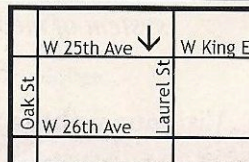
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year, and they've kept the weight off."

Lynds, Rochester and Wilkins all contend that the skills and tools they learned using the HCG diet has ensured the weight will never return.

"I don't call it a diet, actually. I think that's actually the big secret," Wilkins says. "It's not a diet because a diet has a beginning and an end. This is a way of life."

Additional benefits

In addition to energy and vitality, Lynds says that his mind is clearer, he can walk up and down stairs without using the handrails, and the pain from his chronic arthritis is almost completely gone.

Rochester says that HCG can be useful for overall health, not just for weight loss.

"I think a lot of people will focus on the HCG primarily for weight loss, but for myself it was a health choice," she says. "There's a lot of cancer and diabetes that runs in my family, and I was having a lot of health issues before I did it. I was perimenopausal, so I was getting pre-menopause symptoms—those are all gone now. And now I'm healthy, and I'm not at any risk for anything."

Safety concerns

HCG is a legal pharmaceutical drug in Canada and the United States, but is only allowed for treating infertility. It's not approved for weight loss. Currently, offering HCG for weight loss is called

"off-label" use.

Given how complex the endocrine system is, many people have concerns about how HCG might affect them if they are not pregnant, or even female. Dr. Polo says the dose is not high enough to interfere with any hormonal processes.

"The dose is so low. If you took the HCG and put it on a pregnancy stick, it would not go positive," she says. "You're not inducing any pregnancy symptoms."

The use of HCG is spreading in the U.S. and Canada, and it's easy to find the protocols and HCG drops online. But

**"It's not a diet
because a diet has a
beginning and an end.
This is a way of life."**

what many online sources don't offer is the one-to-one check-ins, the detox support and the additional vitamins and minerals. Unsupervised, risks of the HCG diet include low blood sugar, low blood pressure, malnourishment, anemia, hair loss, weakness and fatigue, which is why Dr. Polo and Dr. Lederman say working with a professional is key.

"When done properly, this is a very positive experience where people feel good," says Dr. Lederman. "So many people feel they can do it self-administered, self-supervised. But when you

have someone who knows what they're doing walking you through the program, you have a higher likelihood of achieving your goals."

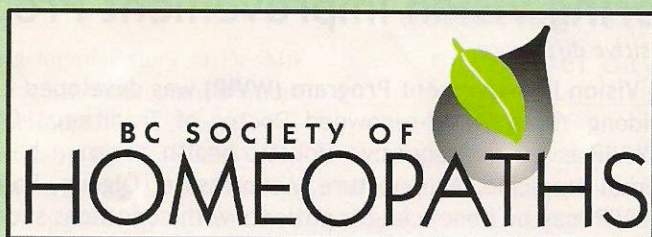
Despite its popularity, there isn't a lot of hard data that HCG actually helps you drop the pounds. There are a few clinical trials and studies that date back to the 1970s, and most of them state that HCG doesn't work for weight loss.

But after treating more than 500 patients using the HCG program, Dr. Lederman isn't concerned about the research because he believes that the diet works.

"The success of it speaks for itself. It's not about the research. It's about the fact that it simply works," he says. "I like what delivers results for people. This is the most exciting tool and program that I've ever been a part of. Every day, I enjoy coming in to work simply to know that I'm changing someone's life and it's not a band-aid. It's treating the cause of their health concerns." ☼

*name changed at client request

Sondi Bruner is a Vancouver-based freelance journalist and holistic nutrition student. Find out more about her writing services at www.sondibruner.com, and explore vegetarian, gluten-free and dairy-free recipes on her food blog, The Copycat Cook (www.thecopycat-cook.wordpress.com).



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