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WEIGHT LOSS

## The hCG Diet: A healthy stepping stone for weight management



By Dr. Jennifer Landa

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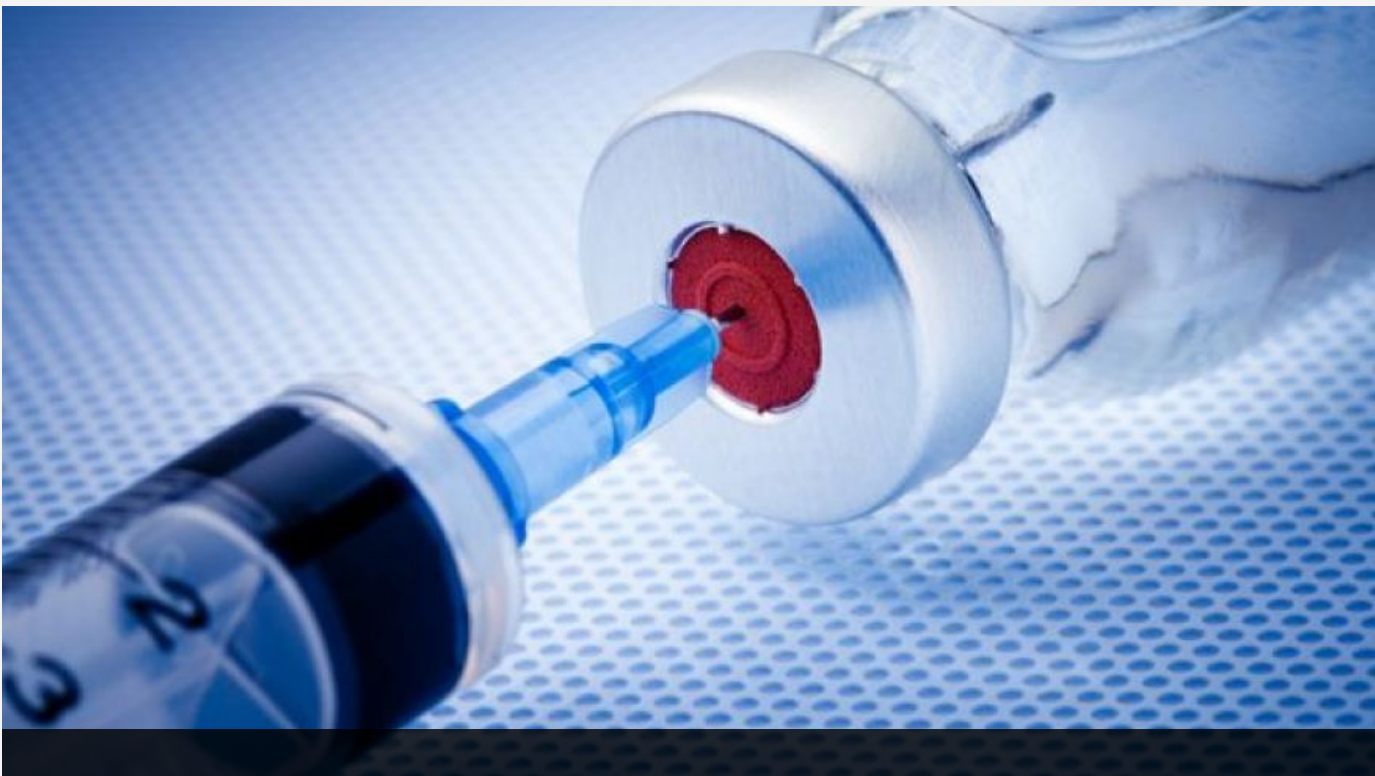
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The hCG diet is not a new concept; although it may seem to be, since it is the latest fad diet to steal the attention of Americans seeking weight-loss nirvana.

However, hCG (human chorionic gonadotropin) – the “hormone of pregnancy” – became a dietary solution in the 1950s, when obesity researcher, Dr. Albert T.W. Simeons of the Salvatore Mundi International Hospital in Rome published his research, *Pounds and Inches*, describing the efficacy of hCG as a weight loss supplement when coupled with a restrictive diet.

The diet did not gain much traction and quickly fell out of popularity in the 1960s. It found its way back into the mainstream in 2007, when an infomercial marketer touted its benefits in a book. Until recently, you could not avoid the billboards, radio ads and late-night TV commercials promising a truly slimmer waistline in a matter of days through the hCG diet.

The controversy over the use of hCG for weight loss stems from the heavy calorie-restriction required and potential for adverse side effects. The hype, along with America's obsession with a "quick-fix" weight loss regimen, have fueled the flames of the controversy and buried the potential for hCG to be known as a tool toward the path to successful, healthy weight management.

According to Simeons, the effectiveness of hCG as a diet supplement is its role in "re-setting" the hypothalamus and changing how the body burns fat. In his research he wrote that there are three types of fat in the body: structural fat, the fat that fills gaps to create protection around organs and bones; reserve fat, used by the body as a sort of nutritional income, as well as for fuel for muscles and body temperature regulation; and "abnormal" fat, which should be available for nutritional reserves, but is actually trapped.

Simeons speculated hCG unlocked the body's ability to burn this trapped fat. Dieters may supplement hCG with a 500-calorie diet and feel no hunger pains because their body is living off the calories from the trapped fat. It is only advisable to participate in this stage of the diet for 21 to 40 days.

To make hCG a tool for success, it is necessary to carefully screen patients and monitor their progress from initiation of the diet to the transition back to eating normal foods. Following the initial stages, under the care of a physician, the patient should slowly return to normal eating and activity. The hCG diet does not teach healthy eating, therefore behavior modification has to be effectively learned in order to ensure the patient's excess weight does not return when returning to healthy, sufficient calorie consumption.

Patients who pursue the hCG diet under the care of a dedicated physician not only benefit from the weight loss, but from improvement in reducing the number of markers of disease. These include metabolic syndrome markers, elevated blood pressure, high blood glucose levels, high C-reactive protein and total cholesterol levels. Some patients may even find they no longer need some of their medications.

To answer the question, yes, hCG is an effective stepping stone for healthy weight management. However, it must be carefully distributed and monitored under the care of a physician and the patient should be guided back into a healthy eating pattern and routine activity.

It should not be distributed and used as a quick-fix or crash diet.

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