

Better Business Bureau: BBB Tip: Spot misleading ads and subscription traps for weight loss products

Posted on Friday, Jan 13, 2023

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Milwaukee, Wis. – When it comes to New Year’s resolutions, scammers know that losing weight and getting in shape is one of the most popular goals. This popularity has led to a slew of scams involving vitamins, supplements, and weight loss formulas, all claiming to offer rapid results. Not only are the products themselves questionable, but so are the business dealings of the companies peddling them.

How the scam works

Most weight loss product scams start with promises that are simply too good to be true. Body wraps, topical creams, dietary supplements, pills, powders, skin patches, and even earrings have been advertised to “melt,” “flush,” “burn,” or “dissolve” away unwanted fat fast. These ads usually come with some amazing before and after pictures of people who claim to have used the product, and glowing five-star reviews. According to [many recent reports](#), these weight loss products often claim to have been featured on popular TV shows like Shark Tank. You may see these ads on TV, in periodicals, or, more commonly, on social media. The sad truth is the ads are misleading, and the products won’t melt away fat or give you a six-pack. In fact, many contain ingredients that can be damaging to your health.

To make matters worse, some of these companies engage in [unscrupulous selling techniques](#). Dozens of [consumer complaints](#) described weight loss programs as difficult to cancel, even if the product doesn’t work as claimed in the ads. Some consumers believed they were making a one-time purchase. Instead, the company repeatedly billed their credit cards for more of the product. When they contacted customer service, the representative informed them that they had signed up for a

subscription, which was only disclosed in the fine print of their original purchase. Canceling an order can be difficult, and getting a refund is nearly impossible.

One consumer reported [this experience to BBB Scam Tracker](#): “I came across what I now realize was a fake advertisement for a weight loss product supported by the legit Shark Tank program. It used names and pictures of real people and their “results” using keto gummies. The advertisement said you could try one bottle and get one free for \$52.44. Instead, I was charged \$104.88. I called them right away to report this and cancel the transaction. I was told I couldn’t cancel because the order had already shipped – only five minutes after I placed it! I called my credit card company, and they recommended returning the product for a refund. After I received the product, I followed the company’s return instructions and sent the product back. A week later, I called them to find out the status of my refund, only to be informed the company has no return/refund policy.”

To help avoid weight loss scams, BBB recommends the following:

- **Always be wary of advertisements and customer endorsements promising “miracle” results or immediate weight loss.** The Federal Trade Commission warns consumers that many shady weight loss products are accompanied by [false promises](#). For example, if an ad says their product will make you lose weight “permanently,” you’re looking at a false promise.
- **Don’t be quick to trust endorsements.** Many scammers use pictures of celebrities, TV show mentions, or well-known company logos to gain consumers’ trust without their permission. Always research the company before doing business with them, no matter who supposedly endorses their product.
- **Avoid products that claim to help lose weight without diet or exercise.** Be especially skeptical of claims that you don’t have to change your eating habits. Doctors, dieticians, and other experts agree that losing weight takes work and should be gradual. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), losing 1-2 pounds per week is a healthy goal and is more successful in achieving long-term weight loss. Pass up any product that promises miraculous, sudden results without any effort.
- **Check a product’s ingredients with the FDA.** Be suspicious of taking special pills, powders, or herbs. Some products have been recalled for

containing ingredients with potentially dangerous effects. Check the list of [public notifications from the FDA regarding potentially harmful weight loss products](#). In Canada, check with [Health Canada](#) for guidelines.

- **Be wary of a lack of an ingredients list.** Some companies have been accused of not advertising certain ingredients that can come with harmful side effects or mix adversely with prescription drugs.
- **Be wary of free trial offers, and before signing up, understand all the terms and conditions.** These deals can become “[subscription traps](#)” that hook consumers into expensive shipments of products they did not agree to buy. Before clicking check out or purchase, make sure the cart only includes the items you wish to purchase and does not include signing up for a subscription unless this is an option you want. Be cautious of any contract that takes payment from your credit card until you cancel.
- **When participating in online forums** and chat rooms focused on weight loss and fitness topics, be wary of individuals pushing products they claim will help quickly reach goals.
- **Be realistic about your fitness goals.** It’s hard work to lose weight. Find a program you can stick with, preferably one that you enjoy. Does a weight loss plan require special foods? Can you cancel if you move or find that the program doesn’t meet your needs? If you need help, ask your doctor for suggestions.
- **Research the company with [BBB.org](#) before purchasing.** Read reviews about the company to see if there are any complaints alleging that it’s a scam.
- **Report the deceptive ads.** Be suspicious of ridiculously positive testimonials on the company website. Testimonials have become an easy marketing tool and are easily faked. These are often accompanied by glorious before and after pictures. Call [your BBB](#) to report suspicious, confusing, or misleading ads to [BBB Ad Truth](#) or report a scam with [BBB Scam Tracker](#).
 - Consumers can also report the ad to the [Federal Trade Commission](#) (FTC) by calling 877-FTC-Help.
 - You can also report fake ads to the FBI’s [Internet Crime Complaint Center](#).

For more information

Check [BBB Scam Tracker](#) to research and report scams. To find [BBB Business Profiles](#) of specific businesses, go to [BBB.org](#).

See [BBB's New year's guide](#) and the [BBB News Feed](#) for more tips and scam alerts.

For an online version of the story click [here](#)

For more information or further inquiries, contact the Wisconsin BBB at www.bbb.org/wisconsin, 414-847-6000 or 1-800-273-1002. Consumers also can find more information about how to protect themselves from scams by following the Wisconsin BBB on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

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