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Heart to Heart Talk

With Phillip S. Chua, M.D.

Bangkok Pills

What are Bangkok Pills?

Bangkok Pills are a combination drug marketed for weight reduction which had gained notoriety a few years ago for the various serious complications reported attendant to their use. According to the weight control company's Dr. Wanit T, who responded to my email, the program is known as "Bangkok Pills" or St Carlos Medislim. I noted with great suspicion that, while he was quite eager for me to order from Medislim and give my credit card number via the internet, he did not want me (and I suppose, the public) to know his surname. I wonder why?

What drugs are in these pills?

Among the substances in these pills are bisacodyl, furosemide, phenteramine, and fenfluramine (a drug banned in the Philippines, Thailand and the United States).

How do appetite suppressants work?

Appetite suppressants curb appetite by causing a feeling of satiety (being full) by increasing the blood level of serotonin and catecholamine, two brain chemicals that affect mood and appetite.

How do Bangkok Pills work?

These are also appetite suppressants, but at the same time they act as a diuretic (induces urination to remove water from the body) because of the furosemide (Lasix, a well-known diuretic) in the Bangkok pills.

Who should not take Bangkok Pills?

No one in his/her right mind should take Bangkok Pills because of the many serious complications that have been reported from their use, the very reason why

these pills are banned. Manufacturers of appetite suppressants in general list the following as contraindications for taking them: pregnancy and breast-feeding, eating disorders, migraine, diabetes, thyroid diseases, glaucoma, high blood pressure, heart conditions, those on MAO (Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitor) antidepressant pills.

Do Bangkok Pills contain Shabu?

Some Bangkok Pills have been marketed to contain Shabu. This is another reason why no one should take these pills, except perhaps by masochist, and only for purposes of self-destruction or suicide.

Is it true Bangkok Pills improve sex drive?

On the contrary, these pills have led to severely diminished libido and sexual performance among men and women. The electrolyte imbalance and altered body chemistry as a result of taking these pills rob the body of its normal healthy harmony. This leads to poor general constitution and bodily functions, including sex. Weight loss might be achieved, but at the severe expense of health and the sense of well-being. Weight reduction for better health is a goal worth achieving, so it does not make any sense at all to risk health itself (or even life) in the process of reaching that goal.

What are the adverse side-effects of taking Bangkok Pills?

Adverse complications reported following ingestion of Bangkok Pills include, among others, tachycardia (rapid heart beat), palpitation (pounding heart beat), arrhythmia (irregular heart rhythm), angina (chest pain), sweating, trembling, anxiety, insomnia, fatigue, drowsiness, dehydration, nausea, vomiting, seizures, stroke or even death. Fenfluramine use has been linked to damages in heart valve and the development of Primary Pulmonary Hypertension (abnormally high pressure in the arteries of the lungs), which are rare but fatal. Death usually occurred within 4 years in 45% of patients taking this appetite suppressant. The FDA banned this drug on September 15, 1997. A few cases have been associated with phentermine intake also.

Are there appetite suppressants that are safe?

Specific proprietary medications prescribed by, and taken under the supervision of, a physician specializing in the management of obesity, used as a part of an approved, well-formulated weight reduction program, are safe. But even these are not used as a first resort therapy. The safest way to control weight is by reduction in the calorie intake and increasing physical activities (daily exercise

program) to burn off calories and fat. After one has tried his/her honest best to eat less and do physical exercise daily, and still unable to lose weight, then a diet suppressant may be recommended by the physician, who is thoroughly familiar with the person's medical history.

How about Fat Burners?

Fat burners as the name implies are supposed to rid the body of fat as a way of reducing weight and fat. These are substances that have serious side-effects also, besides being too expensive for what they are really worth. Taking fat burners is not a healthy way to control body weight. Since the body weight depends on caloric intake (food) versus caloric output (exercise), the physiological and safe strategy is to eat less and do more physical exercises. More than 90% of overweight people can effectively lose weight on their own (using the technic we described in this column) without resorting to diet pills, diet foods or diet drinks, which are just a waste of money.

What is a practical approach to weight control?

One simple and inexpensive way to curb one's appetite is to drink a tall glass of ice cold water or grapefruit juice before each meal. This will make the stomach feel partly full and send a message to the brain that it is partly satisfied. This leads to decrease in the appetite. Another is to stop all snacks and in-between meal binges. For breakfast, a glass of juice and fruits (no rice, no bread, no meat, etc) should be enough. For lunch, vegetable salad and grapefruit fruit juice (not coffee or chocolate or beer or soft drinks) should be adequate. The dinner should be moderate and not a large one to compensate for the other two meals. Eat as little rice and bread (carbohydrates in general) as possible. Daily multivitamins and minerals are recommended. If the weight remains the same, it only means the caloric intake is still too much. Therefore, the intake should be reduced further daily, until the weight (which should be taken once a week) starts coming down. Daily physical exercises, like brisk walking, Tae-Bo, aerobic exercises, ballroom dancing, etc. are a must, if one wishes to control body weight and be healthy. This strategy is fairly simple (which you can do on your own), inexpensive, natural, healthy and devoid of serious complications attendant to ingestion of weight control pills. As is obvious, discipline and firm determination are a prerequisite. Before starting any exercise or weight reduction program, consult your physician for his expert advice.

Our readers are invited to send in their medical questions for possible inclusion in future issues of this column. Mail your questions to the author at Heart to Heart Talk, c/o Cebu Cardiovascular Center, Cebu Doctors' Hospital, Osmena Boulevard, Cebu City, Philippines, or e-mail them to heart@chua.net

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