

## Satisfaction Directly Related to Weight-Loss Methods and Public's Ability to Understand the Skinny Behind Dieting Claims *Coalition Takes Action to Expose Reasons for Dissatisfaction*

**Washington, DC; December 29, 2006** – As many Americans make plans to lose unwanted weight in the New Year, a national survey released today by the Partnership for Essential Nutrition (PEN) finds that dieters who lose weight through a comprehensive program of a reduced calorie diet, increased physical activity and a supportive environment -- the method advocated by public health officials -- are the most satisfied with their results.

Conversely, because the poll finds that major misconceptions are leading to weight-loss failure, the coalition of consumer, nutrition and public health organizations is taking action and issuing a *Weight-Loss Alert* to expose the common myths associated with weight-loss products and services in order to educate the public. According to the coalition, it's these misperceptions that lead to high rates of dissatisfaction and are directly linked with extreme dieting, multiple weight-loss attempts, and the increased risk for health complications.

“Today, Americans are bombarded with competing claims for everything from dietary supplements, to pills and even skin patches and creams, making it confusing for people who are overweight and trying to lose weight,” said Barbara J. Moore, Ph.D., president of Shape Up America!, which is spearheading PEN. “It’s time to shed light on the effective weight-loss methods so consumers won’t invest their hopes and money in dieting fads and products that simply don’t work.”

### **Effort Result of New Findings Linking Hype/Myths to Weight-Loss Failure**

*Weight-Loss Alert* is the outgrowth of a new national survey of 1,014 U.S. adults conducted for the Partnership for Essential Nutrition by Opinion Research Corporation, which finds that 87.4 million Americans (45 percent) went on at least one diet during the last 5 years, including an estimated 79.6 million consumers -- 41 percent of the adult population -- who were actively trying to lose weight during the last year. However, the poll finds high dissatisfaction rates among many dieters, many of whom had dieted multiple times.

A major reason for this high dissatisfaction rate is the methods used by consumers to lose weight. Although the highest rates of satisfaction (89 percent) were documented among dieters adopting a comprehensive weight-loss program (combining a reduced calorie diet with physical activity and a supportive environment), the survey found that less than one-fourth of respondents (23 percent) used this method. Instead, the survey reveals that many dieters (33 percent) are opting for exercise alone to lose weight, which although a healthy thing to do, is not an effective stand-alone weight-loss solution.

Moreover, the survey reveals that more than one in ten dieters (14 percent) are adopting weight-loss methods that are directly linked with high dissatisfaction rates. This includes diet foods (60 percent), over-the-counter diet aids (49 percent), diet books (32 percent) and following a weight-loss plan that specifies exactly what foods to eat (25 percent).

Adding to the public's dissatisfaction, according to the new research, is that many consumers are unrealistic in their weight-loss goals and are making decisions based on popular myths about ways to lose weight. For example, over one-fourth of those surveyed (28 percent) had expectations of losing a lot of weight quickly. The survey also finds that most Americans (55 percent) still don't know that consuming fewer calories is what leads to weight-loss, believing instead that the answer is just reducing fat (24 percent), reducing carbohydrates (18 percent), or eating more protein (4 percent). Further, the survey reveals that a large number of consumers (69 percent) buy into the myth that eating certain foods in combination enhances weight-loss and believe the claim that certain dietary supplements stimulate the body to lose weight.

### **Confronting the “Bogus 12” Diet Myths**

To change these statistics, the Partnership for Essential Nutrition has developed a new *Weight-Loss Alert* section on its Web site – [www.essentialnutrition.org](http://www.essentialnutrition.org) -- where the coalition exposes the “Bogus 12” -- those dieting myths that represent the most significant barriers to effective weight loss:

- 1. Dieting is only about willpower** -- In truth, willpower must be combined with a behavior modification and a comprehensive approach to weight loss.
- 2. Extreme weight-loss is safe** -- Extreme dieting is unhealthy and is a recipe for weight-loss failure and disappointment.
- 3. Calories don't matter: avoiding carbs or fat is the key to weight-loss** -- In reality, a calorie is a calorie whether it comes from carbohydrates, fats or protein. Establishing a calorie deficit by cutting back on calories consumed plus burning more calories through activity produces sustained weight loss.
- 4. Certain foods can burn fat and make you lose weight** -- Some foods with caffeine may speed up your metabolism in the short run but no foods burn fat.
- 5. Starches are fattening and should be avoided when dieting** -- Actually, many foods high in starch -- such as bread, rice, pasta, cereals, beans and some vegetables - - are low in both fat and calories but like all foods, should only be consumed in smaller portions to lose weight.
- 6. Low-fat or no-fat means reduced calories** -- Not always. If the manufacturer adds sugar, flour or starch thickeners to improve the flavor and texture of the food after the fat is removed, the product may contain the same number of calories as the full-fat product.
- 7. Skipping meals is a simple way to cut calories** -- Although it may seem logical, studies shows that people who skip breakfast and eat fewer times during the day tend to be heavier.
- 8. Eating at night increases weight gain** -- It doesn't matter what time of day a person eats. What makes a difference is what and how much they eat and how much physical activity they get during the day.

9. **You can lose weight just by exercising** -- Although physical activity is very healthy, research shows that exercise is not an effective stand-alone weight-loss solution and should be combined with smarter food choices and portion control.
10. **Diet drugs are the only effective option** -- The Food and Drug Administration has only approved the use of two prescription diet drugs for seriously obese people only and cautions consumers to beware of unproven claims that tout special ingredients in dietary supplements that can help overweight men and women lose weight and fat.
11. **Natural or herbal weight-loss products are also effective** -- Dietary supplements that claim to be “natural” or “herbal” are not required to go through rigorous scientific review to prove they are safe or that they work. Buyer beware.
12. **It is possible to burn fat without dieting** -- Diet patches, creams, wraps, belts and other devices don’t work. There is nothing a person can put on their body or rub into their skin that will cause them to lose weight.

According to the coalition, the method for losing weight matters a great deal. While there is “no size fits all” approach to weight loss, weight management experts recommend setting realistic goals at the outset and obtaining responsible guidance from properly educated and trained professionals. Achieving a healthy weight loss also requires behavior modification, a supportive atmosphere and following a comprehensive weight-loss program that is sustainable – meaning the method must address ways to keep weight off long term.

#### **About the Partnership for Essential Nutrition**

Formed in 2004 to promote programs, policies and research that will advance public understanding about the essentials of a nutritionally balanced diet, the 16 members of the Partnership for Essential Nutrition are: Alliance for Aging Research, American Association of Diabetes Educators, American Council on Science and Health, American Institute for Cancer Research, American Obesity Association, Harvard Medical School, MedStar Research Institute, National Consumers League, National Women’s Health Resource Center, Nutritional Sciences Program at the University of Washington, Pennington Biomedical Research Center, Shape Up America!, Society for Women’s Health Research, University of California at Davis Department of Nutrition, UCLA Center for Human Nutrition, and Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center.

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