

B12 and Weight Loss???

by Ann Gerhardt, MD

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B12 has rejoined the weight loss world's quick-fix toolbox. Maybe acai berry and hoodia didn't make enough money for the hucksters. We have no evidence that B12 promotes weight loss, but that doesn't keep people from promoting it.

The hook: Obviously anything that requires an injection must be pretty powerful at doing something. Some claim to have special B12 pills that work as well as the injections, which surely must be worth every excessive penny.

Is there any basis for B12-weight loss claims? In one 2005 study, people who took supplements including B12 gained less weight over 10 years compared to those who took no supplements. But no one looked at their diets and exercise, and, in general, people who take supplements tend to follow more healthy lifestyles, usually leading to less obesity.

Weight-loss predators say that B12 increases energy. We need B12 to make hemoglobin, which carries oxygen in the blood. Inability to make hemoglobin leads to anemia, which definitely makes someone feel tired. Anyone with adequate body stores of B12 and no anemia feels no different after a B12 shot than they did before. B12 boosts energy only in a person with a real B12 deficiency.

Claims that B12 directly increases metabolic rate are sheer hokey. Here's the only connection - If a person with B12-deficient anemia corrects that deficiency, he might feel well enough to be more active and build lean tissue, thereby raising energy expenditure and metabolic rate. We also need B12 for optimal nerve and brain function, but that doesn't change metabolic rate.

It is easy to get enough B12 in the diet – just eat animal products, including dairy. An omnivore with a reasonable diet who then becomes a vegan vegetarian (absolutely no animal foods) has enough B12 stored to last up to 3 years. Vegan vegetarians are most at risk of B12 deficiency. Their colonic bacteria save them, however, since these bacteria make B12, which we

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absorb through the gut and use. A good reason to avoid colon cleansing.

Other groups at risk for B12 deficiency are those who lack stomach acid, which aids B12 absorption. People who take acid blockers (for ulcers or reflux), are elderly and don't make much acid anymore, have had their stomachs removed or gastric-bypass surgery, or have pernicious anemia are at risk and may need supplements.

Purveyors of B12 for weight loss prey on obese people's frustrations and natural desire to achieve the goal without changing one iota of diet or physical activity. My natural German parsimony is coming out – Why not spend a little money on a piece of fish and get both B12 and protein, as well as a host of other nutrients, instead of blowing a paycheck on supplement bottles and injections? The special, low price offered on the Internet is about 10 times the generic cost and you have to buy needles and syringes.

For those who really do need B12 supplements because of dietary deficiency, correct the deficiency with food. Pills only work in high doses. Food B12 is much more absorbable. People with no stomach or no stomach acid, should use nasal gel B12 or a supplement you put under your tongue, or get injections.