

# Ready for the hCG diet?

Can a hormone secreted during pregnancy induce weight loss? Finds out Lisa Antao

**W**e all know that pregnancy is synonymous with weight gain. But did you ever think that a hormone secreted during pregnancy, if taken artificially, could in fact, make you lose weight? Sounds paradoxical, right? But this is the principle behind the hCG diet, which used to help people with moderate and

severe obesity to shed excess pounds. Read on to know more about this controversial diet.

## THE DIET

The term hCG stands for human chorionic gonadotropin, a hormone that is secreted naturally in the placenta during pregnancy, enabling the mother to draw energy from the fat stored in the body for nourishing the baby. British endocrinologist Dr Albert TW Simeons discovered the use of the hCG hormone to induce weight loss among obese people a few decades ago.

The hormones are available in the form of pills, drops and injections. Though not marketed by Indian pharmaceutical companies, the products for this diet can be bought online.

## RISKS

If one can attain

hCG hormones are available in the form of drops, pills and injections

the desired weight loss with a very low calorie diet then what is the need of giving hCG? Diabetologist, obesity and hormones specialist Dr Deepak Chaturvedi who has incorporated the hCG protocol for his patients, says, "It is very difficult to follow a very low calorie diet plan for a period as long as six to eight weeks without having the adverse effects of starvation such as weakness, depression, hair fall, etc. Following the hCG protocol prevents all these symptoms and the weight loss is very physiological not pathological."

This diet is not recommended for people with diabetes, hypertension, kidney problems, hypothyroidism, anxiety disorders, fibroids, malignancy of prostate/ breast/ uterus and other medical issues. "I prescribe the hCG protocol for my obese patients as an add-on treatment along with the conventional medical treatment. Not everyone is fit for hCG protocol and vice versa," opines Dr Chaturvedi.

Laparoscopic and bariatric surgeon Dr Shashank Shah says, "Any very low calorie diet can induce weight loss; and it's not surprising to have some weight loss with hCG diet." However, he wouldn't approve this diet to his patients as it has not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and also because there are many ways to induce weight loss but few are available for the maintenance of weightloss. The same is true about the hCG diet and there is no long term data available for this.



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**BE PREPARED:** This diet can help you lose weight but comes along with its own share of side-effects

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

Nutritionist Dr Zainab Sayed explains, "The function of the hCG hormone allows women and men to lose weight while on a restricted calorie diet. The hormones which are taken each day, trick the brain into thinking the person is in fact pregnant, whereby the person reduces their caloric intake to about 500 calories per day, similar to during a fast, and the rest of the energy needs are met from the fat which is stored in the body. hCG triggers the body to draw from excess fat stored to fuel daily energy needs, as if the body were feeding a fetus."

## COST FACTOR

The average cost of the 60-day hCG protocol is about ₹ 12,000.

## SIDE-EFFECTS

Low blood pressure or hypotension, giddiness, bloating, irregularities in menstrual cycles, breast engorgement are some of the possible side-effects of this diet. Also, if not followed under supervision, the diet can cause weight gain too!