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Natural Appetite Suppressants that Work Without the Risks of Weight Loss Pills

Dr. Josh Axe | January 25th 2017

No doubt about it, overeating — and its connection to more and more people becoming overweight or obese — is one of the most complex and challenging issues in health care today. There are many reasons why you might feel like you're always hungry, including nutrient deficiencies, a lack of fiber or healthy fats in your diet, fatigue, or high amounts of emotional stress. However, it doesn't have to be this way. Natural appetite suppressants can help you achieve satiety and avoid overeating, and they can help you do that without the dangers of diet pills. While manufacturers of weight loss pills continue to promote the convenience and rapid results associated with their products, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and other health authorities warn against their use. Some of the main reasons that appetite-suppressing weight loss pills are considered to be at least somewhat dangerous include medication interactions, tainted or unlisted ingredients, high amounts of caffeine, and fillers or synthetic additives that cause negative reactions, just to name a few.

The good news is this: There appear to be safer and more natural options for suppressing your appetite (and potentially losing some weight as a result) without so much risk involved. In fact, throughout history cultures all over the world have consumed natural foods, teas and spices that are now proving to be beneficial for metabolic functions and energy expenditure. Consuming natural appetite suppressants, such as filling, fat-burning foods, nutrients like conjugated linoleic acid and chromium, probiotics, and anti-aging beverages like green tea, can help you keep mindless cravings, a habit of snacking or a sweet tooth under better control.

What Is an Appetite Suppressant?

Appetite suppressants are either pills, drinks, supplements or whole foods that help keep you from overeating. Natural appetite suppressants — which have some similarities to commercial weight loss pills but some important differences — may help tackle some of these issues related to obesity or emotional eating in part by balancing levels of "hunger hormones," such as ghrelin and leptin. Ghrelin and leptin rise and fall throughout the day depending on things like how much you've recently eaten, your mood, stress level, sleep, genetics, current weight and level of inflammation. In other words, there's a lot at play when it comes to suppressing or stimulating your daily appetite.

In addition to decreasing your appetite through hormone regulation, nutrients or essential oils used for safely promoting weight loss can help tip the scale in your favor in several other ways, such as burning more stored body fat for energy (these are known as thermogenics), improving balance of blood sugar levels, curbing cravings for junk foods or sweets, improving thyroid health, increasing release of "happy hormones" or endorphins like serotonin, and possibly giving you a bit more energy throughout the day to be used for extra physical activity.

There are all sorts of products available today that claim to have these appetite-dulling effects, but not every kind has been shown to work or even to be very safe. Examples of weight loss supplements that pose the most risks include guarana, garcinia cambogia, bitter orange or ephedrine. According to the FDA, "Supplements aren't considered drugs, so they aren't put through the same strict safety and effectiveness requirements that drugs are." That's why I recommend approaching weight loss holistically — especially by eating filling, fat-burning, natural foods and other natural appetite suppressants that won't potentially lead to complications like taking pills or consuming high amounts of caffeine can.

Top 5 Natural Appetite Suppressants

1. Green Tea Extract

Green tea has been consumed for thousands of years and is still one of the healthiest beverages available to us today. It's been the focus of hundreds of studies related to everything from preventing cognitive disorders like dementia to managing metabolic dysfunction. Recently, certain antioxidants and substances in green tea extract have been tied to beneficial effects on metabolic diseases and improvements in regulating appetite hormones.

A Cochrane meta-analysis including 14 studies involving use of green tea found that its consumption was associated with mild but significant weight loss results compared to controls or placebo. One study that tested the effects of green tea extract on a group of adults compared to a control group not taking green tea found that after 12 weeks, those taking 857 milligrams of green tea had significantly lower levels of ghrelin (known as the hunger hormone).

Participants in the green tea extract group also had improvements in cholesterol levels and elevated levels of adiponectin compared to the placebo group. Low levels of adiponectin have been tied to problems like insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome and increased inflammation. EGCG, the most abundant green tea catechin and a powerful bioactive constituent, has also been shown to act like a cancer-fighting compound and promote thermogenic activities in studies, therefore decreasing fat cell proliferation and helping burn body fat for energy.

Although not every study has shown such strong and positive weight loss results associated with green tea extract, it seems safe for most adults to take up to 800–900 milligrams daily, usually spread out over three increments. Although they're generally rare, when taking green tea extract be on the lookout for reported adverse effects that might include mild headaches, signs of hypertension, constipation or possibly increased symptoms of urinary tract infection.

2. Saffron Extract

Some research suggests that taking certain saffron extracts can have positive effects on mood regulation by increasing endorphin and serotonin levels. Saffron's effects when it comes to suppressing appetite, including leading to reduced snacking and an elevated mood, seem to be the result of increased serotonin action in the body. This has been shown to help improve symptoms of depression, emotional eating and PMS after about six to eight weeks of treatment. In fact, certain studies have found that saffron extract can work almost as well as taking a low-dose prescription antidepressant drug (such as fluoxetine or imipramine).

Additionally, while research shows mixed results, there's some evidence that taking a chemical from saffron called crocetin might decrease fatigue during exercise and help with increasing

energy expenditure. To get the antidepressant benefits of saffron, start with the standard daily dose of 30 milligrams, used for up to eight weeks. If you have any existing condition that might interfere with saffron's influence on serotonin metabolism (like depression, for example), it's a good idea to get your doctor's opinion first.

3. Grapefruit Essential Oil

Grapefruit's benefits for weight loss have been the focus of dozens of studies and seem to be due to beneficial acids, antioxidants, volatile oils and enzymes that help reduce your appetite, lower cravings, help stimulate the lymphatic system and give you a mild dose of uplifting energy.

Research regarding grapefruit's effects on olfactory stimulation (how smelling the aroma affects the central nervous system) shows that inhaling the fruit's smell can positively alter autonomic nerve signaling, lipolysis (fat metabolism) and appetite regulation. Here are several findings from a number of studies about how grapefruit essential oil impacts appetite and body weight:

- The scent of grapefruit oil excites sympathetic nerves that supply the brown adipose tissue and adrenal glands, which may help stimulate weight loss.
- Smelling grapefruit also helps stimulate ghrelin-induced feeding, making you feel fuller and less likely to give in to cravings.
- Enzymes found in the rind (skin) of the grapefruit have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. They can help with the digestion of fats or sugar and the maintenance of balanced blood glucose levels, which might keep you from feeling cranky and in need of a quick caffeine or sugar fix.
- Grapefruit oil and extract have been shown to be beneficial for those with insulin resistance or diabetes, causing a significant reduction in two-hour post-glucose insulin levels compared with placebo.
- Some also find that the clean scent of citrus fruits helps reduce cravings for sweets and improves mood enough to reduce emotional eating. Body fat also is broken down by the enzymes found in grapefruit.

Certain studies have shown that just three 15-minute exposures to grapefruit essential oil each week helped participants reduce their appetites and practice habits (like slow, mindful eating) that better control their weight. How can you use grapefruit essential oil at home or when you're on the go? Trying adding several drops of pure grapefruit essential oil (citrus paradise) either to a diffuser in your office/home, to your shower or bath soap, or with a carrier oil to be massaged right onto your skin (just do a skin patch test to be sure you don't have an allergic reaction first).

4. Foods High in Fiber

Dietary fibers, whether from food sources or in concentrated supplement form, have been used for hundreds of years to promote fullness, improve gut health and digestive functions, and help maintain strong immunity and heart health. Despite the fact that fiber intake is inversely associated with hunger, body weight and body fat, studies show that the average fiber intake of adults in the United States is still less than half of recommended levels.

What is it about fiber that dulls your appetite? Because fiber is not able to be digested once consumed, plus it absorbs so much of its own weight in water, high-fiber foods help slow your body's digestion of glucose (sugar), keep you feeling fuller for longer and beat cravings. Many foods high in fiber are also very nutritionally dense, meaning you get more bang for your

nutritional buck and help prevent dehydration or deficiencies.

Eating a high-fiber diet — similar to the Mediterranean diet or the way that those known for longevity living in the Blue Zones eat — has been linked to a longer life span, better regulation of healthy body weight, improved gut/digestive health, hormonal health and much more. According to research in the Obesity Reports, “Evidence points to a significant association between a lack of fiber intake and: ischemic heart disease, stroke, atherosclerosis, type 2 diabetes, overweight and obesity, insulin resistance, hypertension, dyslipidemia, as well as gastrointestinal disorders.”

To fill up on the right foods faster and for longer, consume more high-fiber foods, including chia seeds, flaxseeds, starchy or non-starchy fresh veggies, beans or legumes, and fruit (especially berries).

5. Spicy Foods

Naturally spicy (plus anti-inflammatory) ingredients like cayenne, black pepper, curry, turmeric, ginger, dandelion or cinnamon might help increase your body’s ability to burn fat, suppress hunger levels, normalize glucose levels, reduce free radical damage associated with aging and reduce your appetite for sweets.

Studies have found that results associated with eating spices like cayenne with high-carb meals indicate that red pepper increases diet-induced thermogenesis (heating the body and burning of fat) and lipid oxidation. Other research regarding the effects of capsaicin, the phytochemical responsible for the spiciness of peppers, has shown that this compound can modulate metabolic activities through affecting transient receptors in the digestive system, such as one called TRPV1.

Because they’re loaded with benefits, virtually free from calories and easy to use on all sorts of recipes, there’s basically no reason for anything but love for spices. There’s evidence that including more spices and herbs in your diet (especially turmeric, black pepper and cayenne pepper) can help you reduce intake of things like flavor enhancers, salt and sugar while helping you reduce weight gain without having negative effects. Try adding some to homemade tea or detox drinks, marinades, on top of fish or other proteins, in a stir-fry, on veggies, or in soups.

Other Tips for Keeping Your Appetite Under Control:

- Consume omega-3 fatty acids and probiotics. Both are tied to reduced inflammation, better mood control, anti-aging effects and improved gut/digestive health.
- Eat enough protein and healthy fats, which are just as crucial for controlling hunger pangs as fiber is.
- Drink more water.
- Curb emotional eating by managing stress. Learning to eat mindfully can help with feeling more satisfied from your meals.
- Get enough sleep.
- Be careful not to overtrain, which can keep you feeling very hungry and fatigued no matter what you eat.

The Dangers of Prescription Diet Pills

Commercially sold diet pills usually contain a mix of stimulants, including caffeine, herbs, and sometimes digestive enzymes or acids. Generally, they come with adverse side effects, making

them unhealthy ways to lose weight.

Caffeine is one of the most common weight loss ingredients because it often has the appealing effects of dulling someone's appetite, improving motivation and increasing energy for activity. However, as you may have experienced yourself in the past, consuming too much caffeine within a short time period can cause strong side effects like jitteriness, headaches, insomnia, anxiety, heart palpitations, diarrhea and more.

While the majority of adults worldwide consume at least some caffeine daily, mostly in the form of coffee or tea, abnormally high amounts of caffeine are usually limited to "fat-burning" supplements. When weight loss pill manufacturers include caffeine in amounts they're rarely used otherwise, it's likely to cause both short-term issues like dependence and jitteriness or, even worse, dangerous interactions with existing medical conditions or medications.

Due to interactions with medications or changes in blood pressure, other side effects of popular weight loss pills — like guarana, garcinia cambogia or ephedrine, for example — can include anxiety, trouble sleeping, indigestion, diarrhea, rapid heartbeat, headaches, dependency and blood pressure changes that can sometimes be dangerous.

Some commercially available thermogenic supplements (especially those containing ephedrine, also called ephedra) have even been found to induce acute liver failure and contribute to serious reactions like excessive bleeding, increased pressure in the brain, fatigue, malaise and jaundice. This is one reason why ephedrine is now banned as a dietary supplement ingredient in the U.S. — due to an increase in reported reactions hypertension, palpitation, stroke, seizures, heart attack and even in rare cases death.

Precautions When Using Natural Appetite Suppressants

Because there's always the risk for developing many different reactions depending on your current health and age, pay attention to how you feel even when using natural appetite suppressants. Follow dosage directions carefully, since high doses can cause dangerous reactions like poisoning, yellow appearance of the skin or mucous membranes, vomiting, dizziness, diarrhea, and heart problems.

Generally speaking, not enough is known about the safety of using even natural appetite suppressants during pregnancy or breastfeeding, so to stay on the safe side it's wise to avoid use of supplements mentioned above during these times. Children and the elderly should also generally avoid consuming too much caffeine or supplements without a doctor's opinion first.

If you have any of the below health problems, talk to a professional before attempting to suppress your appetite for weight loss (especially if you take medications daily):

- Heart conditions, like high or low blood pressure or palpitations.
- A mental health condition like anxiety, insomnia depression or bipolar disorder, since certain supplements like saffron or green tea extract may affect your mood and energy levels.
- Dizziness or vertigo, as even low levels of caffeine can make these worse.
- Allergies to pepper, Lolium, Olea or Salsola plant species, since come herbs or spices like saffron and cayenne can cause allergic reactions in susceptible people.

Here's the bottom line on using natural appetite suppressants compared to other appetite suppressants: While weight loss pills, teas or other products may possibly give you a lift in energy, dulled appetite or temporarily elevated mood, they're unlikely to result in any long-term weight loss, especially when you don't make other healthy lifestyle changes. Focus on eating a well-rounded, nutrient-dense diet, preventing deficiencies in key vitamins or minerals, and staying active. Then you shouldn't need to turn to weight loss products in the first place.

Final Thoughts on Natural Appetite Suppressants

- Popular weight loss pills — like guarana, garcinia cambogia or ephedrine — are often used to suppress one's appetite and help with weight loss. But it's fairly common to experience some side effects when taking these products, including jitteriness, anxiety, trouble sleeping, indigestion, diarrhea, rapid heartbeat or headaches, which is why natural appetite suppressants are always better options.
- Natural appetite suppressants include green tea extract, high-fiber foods, saffron extract, grapefruit essential oil and spices like cayenne.
- These natural appetite suppressants, herbs, foods and compounds can help nip cravings by inducing thermogenesis, warming the body, balancing blood sugar levels, absorbing water in your digestive tract, reducing inflammation, improving your mood or energy, balancing hunger/fullness hormones like ghrelin and leptin, and altering release of certain digestive enzymes.