

FTC goes after weight loss scammers

By ACSH Staff — January 8, 2014



Every New Year, millions of Americans vow to lose weight.

But it's a challenging resolution, because losing weight can be a slow process involving denying oneself the pleasures of sloth and snacking. However, many companies try to help consumers along with miracle products ranging from powder to sprinkle on food, to creams to rub on thighs. Most assure the gullible that no exercise or will power is required to attain the perfect body.

Unfortunately, these are empty promises: if there were a miracle cure for obesity, someone would have found it already. That hasn't stopped the scammers from advertising their fraudulent wares but maybe the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) can help. The FTC is the federal agency that watches over advertisements, endeavoring to ensure that they are accurate and not misleading.

As reported in both the [New York Times](#) [1] and [USA Today](#) [2], the FTC has announced enforcement actions against four companies. Sensa, the company that advertises a powder to sprinkle on foods, will pay \$26.5 million in fines, L Occitane will pay \$450,000 for claiming its skin creams could slim the body; LeanSpa's principal and his 3 companies will cough up \$7 million for deceptive promotion of acai berry and colon cleanse products. And the HCG Diet Direct company, which touted an unproven human hormone, was fined \$3.2 million.

The director of the FTC's consumer protection bureau, Jessica Rich, was quoted in USA Today: "[T]he chances of being successful just by sprinkling something on your food, rubbing cream on your thighs, or using a supplement are slim to none. The science just isn't there."

The FTC has gone after such weight loss scams in the past, and even has a [website for consumers](#) [3] to help them determine the truthfulness (or lack thereof) of weight loss advertising.

ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava opined I'm very pleased that the FTC is taking this action it's certainly important to try to keep these companies in line. Unfortunately, she continued, the fact that the FTC has gone after such bad actors multiple times shows just how attractive the weight loss field is for unscrupulous marketers. This is truly a situation of caveat emptor, or let the buyer beware!

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Links

[1] http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/08/business/us-charges-4-companies-with-deception-in-weight-loss-products.html?_r=1

[2] <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/01/07/ftc-charges-deceptive-weight-loss-products/4354669/>

[3] <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/topics/weight-loss-fitness>