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On Drugs and Therapeutics

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IN BRIEF

Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (hCG) for Weight Loss

A Medical Letter reader asked if human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG; *Novarel*, *Pregnyl* and others) has any value as an adjunct to diet, adding that it is widely used for this indication in his area. Normally secreted by the placenta during pregnancy, the main therapeutic use of this gonad-stimulating polypeptide, which is not absorbed from the GI tract, has been in the parenteral treatment of infertility.¹ It has also been injected by male athletes as an undetectable stimulus to production of testosterone.²

Use of hCG as an adjunct to diet goes back to the 1950's, when a British physician named Simeons recommended daily injections of the hormone combined with a 500 kcal diet, and such use came to be known as the Simeons method. One double-blind study after another throughout the second half of the 20th century found hCG to be worthless for weight loss or maintenance.³

1. Drugs for assisted reproduction. *Treat Guidel Med Lett* 2003; 1:89.
2. Performance-enhancing drugs. *Med Lett Drugs Ther* 2004; 46:57.
3. GK Sabine Lijesen et al. The effect of human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG) in the treatment of obesity by means of the Simeons therapy: a criteria-based meta-analysis. *Br J Clin Pharmacol* 1995; 40:237.

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