

FTC Guidelines for Identifying Weight Loss Scams

The Federal Trade Commission recently launched its "Red Flag" education campaign to help consumers and the media identify weight-loss product ads containing claims that are too good to be true.

"Unfortunately, there are way too many ads for scientifically impossible weight-loss products in the popular media," said FTC Chairman Timothy J. Muris. "The media should institute screening programs to 'red flag' deceitful weight-loss ads and refuse to run them. To help media advertising staff identify bogus claims, we're providing thousands of free copies of the 'Red Flag' booklet."

In September 2002, the FTC staff issued a report on weight-loss advertising that concluded that, despite vigorous FTC law enforcement and consumer education efforts, fraudulent and misleading weight-loss advertising was widespread and on the rise.

According to the FTC, ads that make any of the following claims are almost certainly false or misleading:

1. Causes weight loss of two pounds or more a week for a month, or more without dieting or exercise.
2. Causes substantial weight loss, no matter what or how much the consumer eats.
3. Causes permanent weight loss (even when the consumer stops using the product).
4. Blocks the absorption of fat or calories to enable consumers to lose substantial weight.
5. Safely enables consumers to lose more than three pounds per week for more than four weeks.
6. Causes substantial weight loss for all users.
7. Causes substantial weight loss by wearing it on the body or rubbing it into the skin.